

ONE GRATEFUL MAN
LUKE 17:11-19

It's one of my (several) favorite Peanuts cartoons: Linus is shown sitting at a table, pencil in hand. In the second panel the paper he was writing on is crumpled with his expected exclamation, "Rats!" In the third panel we see a trash can surrounded by numerous pieces of wadded up paper and read Linus' plaintive sigh: "It's hard to write a thank you note for a Christmas present you've already broken."

We might amend that simply to say, "It's hard to remember to say, 'Thank you.'"

When I was growing up, like most homes, dad had some house rules for my brother and me:

- ✓ ALWAYS look twice before crossing the street. I learned a painful lesson on the front end of a car for not obeying that one.
- ✓ NEVER talk back to your mother. I experienced a different kind of pain the few occasions I dared to test this truth.
- ✓ ALWAYS be on time — or call to say why you can't make it. I remember one time I thought I was too old for this rule (why does the teen-age mind think that way?). I called the next time.
- ✓ ALWAYS say "thank you." Thank you for the gift. Thank you for dinner. Thank you for helping me.

That last one is pretty simple (they all were, really). It was a rule that taught me I was indebted to others; I was not self-sufficient. It was a good rule (and still is). It's a good rule because gratitude doesn't come naturally. In fact, if you figure the percentage from one of the stories from Scripture, you might conclude that only 10% of people are genuinely thankful for what they receive.

In a brief story in the life of Christ that is only recorded by Luke, we see at least four theological truths and their relationship to thankfulness. Would you open your Bibles to Luke 17, and let's meditate together on Christ's healing of the ten lepers and the lessons of thankfulness.

WHEN GOD EXTENDS MERCY, BE GRATEFUL.

(God is always extending mercy and we should always be grateful).

1. Mercy: What God Does for Needy People (vv. 11-14)

- ✓ The need for mercy (vv. 11-13)
- ✓ The mercy given (v. 14)

2. Worship: The Appropriate Response to Mercy (vv. 15-16)

3. Gratitude: The Missing Response to Mercy (vv. 17-18)

4. Salvation: The Gracious Addition to Mercy (v. 19)

This passage highlights four theological truths and how those truths intersect our lives.

1. Mercy: What God Does for Needy People (vv. 11-14)

- Jesus **was on the way to Jerusalem**. This is in an extended travelogue section in Luke (9:51 – 19:28). This is the third time it says that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem (9:51; 13:22), though the chronology is very difficult to figure out. What is also important is that this is also called the “Samaritan Section” because of three extended stories about Jesus and Samaritans (9:51ff; 10:30ff; 17:11ff).
- **The need for mercy (vv. 11-13)** — some observations:
 - ✓ **He was passing between Samaria and Galilee** (v. 11) refers to the Jews’ practice of avoiding Samaria. The region of Samaria was north of Jerusalem and south of Galilee (between the two); so if one was in Galilee, headed to Jerusalem, as Jesus was, they would head south toward Samaria and then at the border they would turn east to get across the Jordan River and then go south until they reached the southern border and then they would turn back west, cross the Jordan, and go toward Jerusalem. It was a detour of many miles, but they did it because they had such animosity for the Samaritans. (This is also what Jesus did not do in John 4, but He does do it here).
 - ✓ Notice that the **village** (v. 12) is unnamed. We are not intended to know the name of the village. It could have been *any* border village. And that is the point of the text. This could have happened anywhere in Israel. The location was unremarkable and the unnamed people were unremarkable. This is ordinary life in Israel. This is the way anyone would have or could have acted.
 - ✓ The greeting committee for Jesus was **ten leprous men**.
 - Leprosy is what is called Hansen’s Disease. It is a neurological disease that attacks the skin, peripheral nerves (generally around the wrists, elbows, and knees) and mucous membranes. It starts with a patchy discoloration of the skin, usually white or pink and then spreads. The disease deadens the nerves in the affected areas so the patients feel nothing in those areas. So they will often experience damage to their limbs because they don’t feel when they have injured themselves. There is a more mild form of the disease (tuberculoid) that may be healed even without treatment. Leprosy was relatively common in the OT, so the Mosaic Law proscribed how to evaluate and regulate suspected cases (Lev. 13-14).
 - One main result of the disease in the OT was that sufferers were isolated from the rest of the community and considered unclean (Lev. 13:3, 8ff). Because they were isolated, they were unable to participate in regular life in their homes and they were prohibited from temple worship. They were not allowed to get close to other individuals (Lev. 13:45-46), which is why Luke notes that they **stood at a distance** (v. 12). It also appears that they were not *in* the village when they met Jesus, but outside and they called out to Him **as He entered...**

- One commentator notes, “This was a pathetic, lonely group of outcasts, eking out a survival existence on the fringe of society.” [MacArthur]
- In fact, we see just how ostracized they are when we notice that a Samaritan leper was allowed to live with Jewish lepers. The Jewish leper couldn’t be more unclean than his leprosy, so he was willing to invite the Samaritan leper to live with him.
- ✓ They **met Him** [Jesus]. That is, they sought out Jesus. Perhaps they’d heard of his miraculous work with other lepers (5:12–13; 7:22). Jesus had healed many lepers; having heard the stories they went for healing also.
- ✓ When they addressed Jesus, they called him **Master**. This is not the usual word for Master (*kurios*); this word denotes someone who has significant power and authority; He is a commander and overseer. What is significant is that every other time the word is used, the disciples use it of Jesus, which might indicate that they saw something unique in His authority that others missed. These men appealed to that authority and command.
- ✓ The request is simple: **have mercy on us**. The word “mercy” refers to compassion and the way they ask it denotes a sense of urgency — won’t you please take pity and be merciful to us *now*? Notice also that they don’t specifically ask for healing, but there is no doubt what they want.
 - The compassion of Christ was their only hope. They had nothing else. “Their disease was incurable; their situation hopeless; their lives miserable. Jesus offered their only chance for deliverance. Mustering what hopeful faith they had, these ten desperate men begged the Healer to heal them.” [MacArthur]
 - It is significant to note that multiple times in the gospels, individuals appeal to Christ to extend mercy to them — Mt. 9:27 (blind men); 15:22 (Canaanite woman); 17:15 (demon-possessed son); 20:30-31 (blind men); Mk. 10:47-48 (Bartimaeus); Lk. 18:13 (tax-collector). Mercy is the action whereby God, because He has pity on the condemned, withholds judgment that is rightly theirs. It is wrath withheld. The point is this: only those who recognize their unworthiness appeal to God for mercy. They know they are helpless and do not deserve help and do deserve wrath; their only option is God’s kindness that overflows into mercy.
 - *Mercy is what God extends to needy people; mercy is what needy people need from God.*
- ✓ So what will Jesus do with this request for mercy? Notice the next verse...

- **The mercy given (v. 14)**

- ✓ They made a request and Jesus gave a command — ***go and show yourselves to the priests***.
 - A leper would go to his priest when he thought he had been healed and the priest would determine whether or not he was cleansed and if he was, then he would be allowed back into the community (Lev. 14).
 - But Jesus doesn’t directly promise that He would heal them. It’s only implied when He tells them to go to the priest, because that’s the only reason they would go.

- And then notice what else Jesus does. NOTHING. There is no other command for them. No word of encouragement. No physical touch. No movement toward them. It appears that Jesus gave that brief command and then turned and continued into the village.
- It's a test. What would they do? As Lenksi suggests, you can almost imagine them dumbfounded — “what do we do?” You can almost hear them debating — should we go? Every other time Jesus healed, He did it on the spot. Is He believable? He never commanded anyone to go to the priest without first healing him. What do we do???? And perhaps it was resignation that sent them — “Why not? Let's give it a try, we have nothing to lose by going.”
- As an aside, Jesus told them to go to the **priests** (plural); He appears to be making a distinction between the Jewish lepers and the Samaritan leper; they would have to appear before different priests for authentication of their cleansing.
- ✓ The story is dramatic — ***And as they were going they were cleansed.*** The removal of their leprosy was complete and instantaneous! There were no wounds. They instantly had full feeling (did one of them notice by stubbing his toe and feeling it?). Nothing more needed removal. It's fully accomplished. And what is significant here is that this is also the word that is used in the NT of spiritual cleansing (Acts 15:9; Eph. 5:26; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:14, 22-23; Js. 4:8; 1 Jn. 1:7, 9). While all ten lepers were cleansed physically, apparently only the one was cleansed spiritually.
- ✓ This is the kind of Savior and God we have. He is merciful. He cares about our needs. He understands and is compassionate and He is capable of meeting all that we need.
- ✓ It has been said that mercy is “compassion in action.” And someone else said, “Mercy is God's ministry to the miserable.” He has tenderness towards us and He does something about it. He gives what He is able to give so that the burden is relieved. He does that for our physical needs but even more for our spiritual needs:

“He came to die as a priest for his enemies....He is a physician good at all diseases, especially at the binding up of a broken heart. He died that he might heal our souls with a plaster of his own blood, and by that death save us, which we were the procurers of ourselves, by our own sins. And has he not the same heart in heaven?” [Sibbes, *Bruised Reed*, 8-9.]

- We have seen one theological truth in this story — God's mercy, let us see another truth...

2. Worship: The Appropriate Response to Mercy (vv. 15-16)

- Luke is somewhat dramatic in the way he tells the story — *ten* men came; *ten* men voiced their desire for mercy (it has the sense of all talking at once and being a little disharmonious; *ten* left. *One* returned.
- ***One of them.*** They left as a unit; but only one returned. Again, you can imagine a debate — “What just happened? Let's go to the priest; let's get back to our families...” “NO! We must go back to Jesus!” “No, He commanded us to go to the priests, and we need to obey; we can go to Him later...”

- Only one returned to Jesus, and it's safe to assume that only this one returned to Christ because certainly Luke would have noted if the others had come later. The very point of the story is that only one man returned. In fact, the way Luke says it is interesting, **when he saw that he had been healed**. The others certainly saw their healing as well. But this man saw his healing and saw what it *really* was.
- And notice how he returned. He has four responses:
 - ✓ He **turned back** (v. 15). Jesus did not command him to return. And the others didn't. As one commentator suggests, perhaps since they were no longer companions in misery, they were glad to be rid of him. He's gone. But notice also that the Samaritan has left them and their lack of genuine faith to return to the true object of faith.
 - ✓ He was **glorifying God with a loud voice** (v. 15). Notice that while Christ healed the man, he immediately made the connection between Christ and God. Jesus gave him no theological lesson about that, but he immediately understood. He made that connection because the Jews expected that the Messiah would heal leprosy when He came (4:27; 7:22); one healing should have been enough, but for Christ to heal 10 at once was a dramatic validation of His Messiahship. So when this man went back to Christ, he undoubtedly was saying things like, "Messiah has come; you must see Him..." And that he uses a **loud voice** is not insignificant. The vocal chords of lepers would frequently be damaged, so this may have been the first time in years he's had a full voice to use.
 - ✓ And getting back to Christ, **he fell on His face...** (v. 16). He is fully prostrate before Christ. It is an act of humility and worship. But notice also that he does this **at Jesus' feet**. Just minutes before, he kept his distance from Christ, knowing the restrictions that the leprosy made on him. Now the restrictions are removed and he has access to Christ (like the new believer, Eph. 2:18; 3:12).
 - ✓ And he was **giving thanks to Him** (v. 16). How dramatic is this! "Jesus healed him of a dreadful, terminal disease that made his body loathsome not only to others but even to himself. His life was radically improved, so he responded with radical gratitude at the feet of Jesus, soiling the very flesh that had been made clean and 'praising God in a loud voice.'" [Thomas, *DJ*, 31: 16.]
- His "radical" worship was appropriate because of the radical "surgery"

BEFORE HEALING

- one of the crowd
- no voice or reason to praise
- couldn't approach any man — leprosy
- couldn't approach — nationality
- appealed to Christ's mercy

AFTER HEALING

- an individual in fellowship with Christ
 - a voice and a reason to praise
 - could approach Christ
 - could fellowship — one with Christ
 - awed by Christ's majesty
- ✓ One of the most dramatic lines in the story is the end of v. 16 — **And he was a Samaritan**. The pronoun **he** is emphatic — *this one* that returned, *he* was a Samaritan! It's as if Luke says, "Can you believe it??" The hero of the story is a Samaritan — again (as in 10:30ff).

- ✓ This man was an outcast in every way — by birth and by disease, he was nothing to the Jews. But he was redeemable to Christ. No one would have expected Christ to heal or save a Samaritan. Yet this story affirms that Jesus does that very kind of thing. He is merciful to and saves outcasts.
- ✓ If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, maybe it's because you feel like an outcast. You aren't like everyone else and you feel unaccepted by most if not all others. And since no person on earth accepts you perhaps you feel like God in Heaven won't either. But this story shows that he's merciful. He cares about your need and He is willing and able to meet that need. Just go to Him and ask — "will you be merciful and will you save me?"
- ✓ And when He does, do what this man did — go to Him in worship, submission, and gratitude.
- Because of all that Christ had done, a "thank you note" from the Samaritan would have been insulting.
 - ✓ The same is true of us. Cf. **Heb. 13:15** — since Christ has let us into God's city (vv. 13-14), fruity lips are appropriate. Remembering what God has done should result in thanks and changed lives.
 - ✓ As one writer has said, "It is not enough to feel thankful for blessings received; there must be a definite expression of our thanks to God." [Hiebert, *Working with God*.]
 - ✓ Have you taken time recently to examine the extent of God's mercy in your life?
 - ✓ Have you taken time recently to worship and thank God for His mercy to you?

3. Gratitude: The Missing Response to Mercy (vv. 17-18)

- To the Samaritan's return, Jesus asks three questions:
 - ✓ **Were there not ten cleansed?** Notice that Jesus knew over their healing (demonstrating both His omnipotence and omniscience). The question anticipates an affirmative response: Yes.
 - ✓ **But the nine — where are they?** The question is even more dramatic — "the nine — where?" He leaves the questioning hanging and is emphatic.
 - ✓ **Was no one found...except this foreigner?** The word "foreigner" refers to one who is an alien; he is outside the nation of Israel and the covenant promises of God. In other words, the others had every reason to return to the Messiah (who just demonstrated His messiahship); this man didn't have reason (because he was an outsider) to return to Christ as Messiah.
 - ✓ The three questions are designed by Christ to illuminate and draw attention to the differences between the nine and the one. Perhaps when Christ dismissed the 10 lepers so quickly initially the people of the village may have affirmed Him — "good for Him for getting rid of the unclean..." Now Christ makes the village to see that He desires all men (even lepers) to come to Him (Jn. 3:16; 2 Pt. 3:9); and even more, He uses the genuine worship of the one to reveal real the worshippers of Christ.
- Why were these men ungrateful? We can answer that by seeing why the Samaritan was grateful:
 - ✓ The Samaritan glorified God because he deemed God worth the glory.

- ✓ The Samaritan worshipped Christ because he understood his humility before the Savior.
 - ✓ The Samaritan thanked Christ because he believed himself an unworthy recipient.
 - ✓ The Samaritan had genuine (saving) **faith** (v. 19).
- So why were these men ungrateful?
 - ✓ The nine refused to glorify God because they believed they deserved the glory, not God.
 - ✓ The nine refused to worship Christ because they had no humility before Christ.
 - ✓ The nine refused to thank Christ because they believed they were worthy recipients of mercy. They may have said to Christ initially, “Have mercy,” but they believed they were worthy of it that they *should* receive it. And if you believe you are worthy of mercy, you won’t be grateful when you receive it — you’ll simply think, “It’s about time...” Because they missed their real need for mercy, they missed the opportunity to genuinely respond to Christ in gratitude.
 - ✓ The nine had no genuine (saving) **faith** (v. 19).
 - The lack of gratitude of the nine was typical for the nation of Israel. Christ could cleanse not only leprosy, but also sin, and they rejected Christ. The people of the nation didn’t believe they were leprous or sinful, so they killed Christ (Mt. 26:62-66; Lk. 23:13-19ff).
 - ✓ Their only interest in Christ was selfish — “heal us,” “feed us” (Jn. 6:26) — so they weren’t thankful.
 - ✓ The nine were so happy with their temporal gifts that they ignored their eternal needs.
 - ✓ Don’t let familiarity with Christ or desire for temporal gifts or provision of a meal keep you from worshipping Christ and thanking Him for who He is and for what He has done in your salvation.
 - ✓ We have reason every day to give glory to God — even when we are hungry and thirst, God is God and He is good (Ps. 119:68). Give thanks and worship. Don’t overlook His expressions of mercy to you and don’t overlook opportunities to thank and worship Him.

4. Salvation: The Gracious Addition to Mercy (v. 19)

- Jesus has been addressing the crowd that evidently surrounded Him when the Samaritan returned. Now He turns to the Samaritan — ***your faith has made you well*** = obvious reference to physical healing, but also more.
 - ✓ On faith that Jesus could heal Him of leprosy, the Samaritan left to go to the priest.
 - ✓ On faith (believing) that Jesus was the Messiah, the Samaritan returned. And it appears that he returned a regenerated man. Jesus says, ***you faith has made you well***. The word “well” is generally translated, “saved.” It *can* mean physical healing; but Jesus is saying that there is something different about this man and the other nine. All heard Jesus’ command and all left and all were healed. They all had that measure of faith. But this man’s faith was different than the nine. They were healed in body; but he was healed in soul. His life was saved from Hell.

- Here we see the remarkable mercy of God — He met the physical need of the lepers by healing; He also made available the gracious provision of eternal life on top of that.
- This is what my father calls the jelly on top of the peanut butter! God gives abundantly beyond what we comprehend even to ask Him for. We ask for mercy and He gives grace.

All people face...two choices. They can be content with experiencing the common grace of the God who 'causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' (Matt. 5:45). Or they can embrace Jesus Christ as Master and Savior and cry out in penitence, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' (Luke 18:13). Only the latter will be justified (v. 14) and enter God's eternal kingdom."
[MacArthur, 395.]

CONCLUSION: This leaves us all with two questions this morning:

- ✓ Have you received the true mercy of God? I'm not asking if you have the house or car or job or family or children or friends that you want. I'm asking if God has freed you from the penalty of your sins and if you are living in that freedom. Are you a Christ-follower?
- ✓ Have you given thanks for the mercy of God? Have you taken time to reflect on His goodness to you and have you worshipped and thanked Him? He's given you and I all we have. It is more than appropriate to stop, turn, and thank Him.

BENEDICTION: