

**“Lessons on Thanksgiving”**  
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**Sunday, November 22, 2020**

Have you ever been thanked for something— I mean, *really* thanked? If you have, then you know the joy of having done something that blessed others. E.g., I recall a teenager who worked at a business, and the adults at the business were so impressed with his hard work that they praised him before others as to how much they appreciated having him there, and that meant a great deal to him. E.g., one of our family traditions that Emily has helped us build is, that when it is someone’s birthday, we write on five index cards five things we appreciate about the person. This has been a wonderful way of showing appreciation for each other and is quite meaningful for us when it is our birthday! We all enjoy being thanked, and in our passage today we will see that Jesus does as well.

READ Luke 17:11-19 (p. 80)

**CONTEXT:** Jesus has just been teaching on the need for forgiveness and having a humble heart in service to the Lord.

READ vv 11-13. “Jesus entered territory which was not especially friendly to Jews— near Samaria— and He met a group of lepers who did not make Jews feel especially comfortable. Cf. Leviticus 13:45-46; Luke 11:51-56; Acts 8:4-8.” Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and He comes to the borderline between Galilee and Samaria. And there He comes across a group of 10 lepers who apparently live together in the outskirts of a town, from where they would expect some charity from the townspeople. This living arrangement was in accord with Leviticus 13:45-46; READ. To be clear, leprosy was, for the ancient Jew, a “catch-all” category for any kind of skin ailment. Thus it would include not only what we understand today to be leprosy, Hansen’s disease, but also things like psoriasis. Clearly, for Jews, the situation Jesus encounters would make Jews uncomfortable. Sometimes today people feel squeamish around people who have skin problems, and the people who have them also feel self-conscious. E.g., I recall in college I had a prayer partner who met with me for a while once a week, and one week I went to meet him and he was very sad. I asked what the problem was, and, with tears in his eyes, he showed me the inside of his hands, his palms, which had peeled skin all over, and I believe even evidence of some blood. He was ashamed of this and very upset about it. It may have been a nervous condition. We prayed about it, and as I recall this problem eventually went away, or at least got better. This uncomfortable feeling that my friend had was one shared in the ancient world, both by those with the problem and those around them. In a similar way we see in our text that the lepers kept their distance from Jesus.

READ v 14. “The lepers approached Jesus, which showed they knew of His reputation of compassion. Cf. 2 Kings 5:8-14; Mark 1:40-45.” When someone has a gift to heal someone, whether supernaturally or naturally, that

person's reputation will spread. E.g., I recall when we were searching for a doctor to perform a surgery on Norwood about eight years ago, Elena found a doctor in Baltimore, and he was one of the very few people who specialized in this type of surgery, so we drove all the way there twice for the surgeries he needed. There are also people who have a reputation for God using them to bring supernatural healing. E.g., a friend of mine, who played the drums, in college who had a faith healer pray over him and the arthritis in his hands, and his hands were healed, and he played the drums in a Christian band for a time. We are reminded of a similar story as this one from the Old Testament when the military commander from Aram, Naaman, had leprosy and sought healing. It seems he had captured a girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. The servant girl expressed the desire to see Naaman see a prophet in Israel who could heal his leprosy. So the king of Aram gave Naaman a letter to the king of Israel requesting one of their prophets to heal Naaman. Israel's king tore his clothes in dismay, exclaiming, "do I have the power over life and death?". When the prophet Elijah heard about Naaman, he had Naaman come to his house. When Naaman arrived Elijah sent out his servant to Naaman and said to wash seven times in the Jordan and he would be healed. Eventually Naaman does, and he is healed. Jesus also healed a leper earlier, it seems, in His ministry, which we find in Mark 1:40-45, where Jesus even compassionately touches the leper. So Jesus, like Elijah, had a reputation for healing and being compassionate.

READ vv 15-19. "The fact that only one out of the ten lepers returned to thank Jesus made Him impressed not only with the fact that he remembered but also that the others forgot." What is saved until now, and saved for literary effect, is that the one who returned was a Samaritan! Luke seems to have an attraction to this part of Jesus' teaching where He reached out to Samaritans when He passed through Samaria from 11:51-56 and He highlighted Samaritans by having a Samaritan be the hero in the parable of the good Samaritan. It seems to be implied

here that the other nine lepers were Jewish. I. Howard Marshall says perceptively in his *Luke* commentary (p. 652), “The story does not necessarily imply that the other nine lacked faith; the point is rather that their faith was incomplete because it did not issue in gratitude”. It is easy to see how one can forget to say thank you. E.g., I recall someone treated a friend out to eat lunch, and the friend never said, “thank you”. E.g., I recall someone who got a Subway sandwich for a homeless man in New Orleans at the stoplight, and when he approached the homeless man with the sandwich he just said, “I cannot eat that— I am a diabetic”, but no thank you or anything like that. We can be like that with God. E.g., I confess I have been times when I have prayed with someone working through a life crisis, and when the crisis was taken care of and all the drama was over, I just said praise God and that was it. The Holy Spirit started working on me. Why did I not take that moment to go before the Lord in prayer with that person and say a prayer of thanks. I confess that I was a bit embarrassed, didn’t want to “over spiritualize” the situation. Notice I had drifted back to the human worldview— not God’s point of view, a point of view to which I was committed when the crisis was not resolved. The time I think we are often most forgetful of God’s blessings and giving thanks to Him is when we are comparing our lives to others’ lives. And that is exactly where Satan wants us. This trap of Satan happens no matter whether you are a male or female, mother or father, work in the workplace or stay at home, in the ministry or not.

“What do we need to do to be more like the leper who returned?” I encourage us to write our list of 10 things for which we are thankful to the Lord. Let’s keep in mind 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”

Let us be sure to include in our top 10 list to God not only the temporal things for which we are thankful— like cars, houses, family, friends, clothes, etc.— but also those things we can take with us to heaven— love, peace, His promises, forgiveness, and salvation. Also, let us tell someone this week something for which we are thankful about them.