

“Essential Thanksgiving”
Luke 17:11–19
Dr. Mark Cushman
March 12, 2017, Morning Sermon

We’re going to start by reading a simple story from Jesus’ ministry but a very profound story. Luke 11:17–19 says [11] *On the way to Jerusalem he (Jesus) was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. [12] And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance [13] 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. [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. [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.”*

May we ask that God’s blessings continue on us as we study His Word together.

Have you ever been in a place where you had become very aware that it had become unsafe? Perhaps you entered a part of town that you had not desired to enter and you felt a sense of ill-at-ease or perhaps you were in some circumstances where you were surrounded by some strangers that you thought were rather unusual and you were nervous. I recently heard from a missionary that we support who serves in a country that has been traditional closed to the Gospel and it’s kind of a scary place for Christians. I was listening to him give a seminar via Skype at one of our recent General Assembly’s and during his talk he made the comment, ‘After I meet with you I’m going to go meet with some parents to help persuade them that their children will be okay to go study in America.’ These parents were terrified of America and didn’t want their children to study in America. This man as an American was going to try to alleviate their fears. Watching TV today I’m not the least bit surprised at this.

I would say that the Disciples on this occasion in Luke 17 were very ill-at-ease for they were entering an area that they weren’t comfortable with. They probably gathered together in a small group. They were entering a small village and the name of this village is not given but ten lepers approach them. Leprosy in Biblical times was a very serious disease and very contagious. The word leprosy probably referred to a collection of skin diseases but not actually Hanson’s disease which is what leprosy is today. In Biblical times people were fearful of lepers. They assumed if you had leprosy you had been judged by God and that had occurred in Scripture with Miriam, Moses’ sister and Gehazi, Elisha’s servant.

What we find here is that Jesus, rather than cowering, enjoyed ministering to lepers. He did not believe it was a sign of God’s judgment so He welcomed these ten lepers as they came toward Him but stood at a little bit of a distance. In response of their coming to Him, Jesus said, “Go show yourselves to the priests” knowing that they would be healed. This was a bit of an unusual response because we don’t see this happening before but we’re not entirely sure why Jesus did it. We know that He was probably trying to help the Disciples understand that healing didn’t come because of a magic formula or certain activity, so He healed people in a variety of ways so that the focus would always be upon God and His power. Perhaps He was honoring the ceremonial law by asking them to go back and meet with the priests, which was commanded in Scripture. Perhaps He wanted the priests to be interested in His own ministry and come to faith in Christ because of the healing they had seen.

Most likely, He also desired to test the faith of the lepers and to see what was truly in their hearts. Among the lepers we can see two responses. Nine of the lepers, after realizing were being healed or had been healed, continued on their way, no doubt, with great excitement but only one turned and came back to Jesus to praise God. He knelt before Him and gave Him thanks for what He had done. Jesus' reply was 'rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.' It's sad to contemplate the fact that the nine had abandoned Jesus. I have an uncle who wrote a commentary on this portion of Luke and he made the comment, 'the nine lepers went away stupidly content. I think that is very accurate.'

My question then is what was Jesus' real concern with these lepers that left? What was His problem with them? Why was He disappointed in their lack of gratefulness? Some might say it showed cultural insensitivity. In other words, they just weren't taught right. Didn't they know they ought to say 'thanks' when they have been blessed? I was raised in a house where I learned at a very early age to say 'please' and 'thank you.' Those were not options in the home I grew up in.

For the last few months our daughter and son-in-law have been living with us because they are missionaries in the Ukraine and they are back in the states on furlough. They also came back to have a baby and raise some support but they also have a two year old. It has been interesting to watch them raise their two year old and they are already pressing her; when you have a request what do you say? 'please' and when you get something that you want what do you say? 'thank you.' I don't think our two year old granddaughter Lucy has a clue what she is saying but she is doing it because her mom and dad insist and they know thanksgiving/gratefulness is not natural. We are naturally selfish and they are seeking to teach her to practice from the earliest days to be thankful, as they should.

Why do we parents press this on our children? We do this for many reasons but a couple of them would be for the social reasons involved. Showing and expressing appreciation is a vital part of healthy interpersonal relationships – when we relate to our teachers, our bosses, our friends or to members of our family – it is part of what makes civil society civil, it's important and vital in these relationships. More than that, I think there are also personal reasons we do this. Showing and expressing appreciation needs to be a part of my character. It's needed in my life to remind me that I'm not the most important one out there and that I'm not the center of the universe. I am indebted to others for almost all the blessings that I enjoy. Being thankful protects me from that common narcissistic, entitlement mentality that so many people have today, which can really eat away at a person's character in their life.

Was Jesus concerned about these men because of their cultural insensitivity? I really don't think so. It's important and we do it but I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind here. If it wasn't cultural insensitivity maybe it showed Scriptural ignorance on the part of these nine lepers. That would certainly be true. When we come to Scripture we see repeatedly the 'whys' and the 'whens' of appreciation.

For instance these men should have known Psalm 28:6–7 which says [6] *Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.* [7] *The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.* Perhaps they needed to listen to a couple of chapters later in Psalm 30.

Psalm 30:4–5 says [4] *Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.* [5] *For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.* What a terrific reminder that my present

circumstances are only temporary and what God has in store for those who love Him we can hardly imagine. It should swell my heart with thanksgiving even now.

Here is one of the great hymns of thanksgiving in all of Scripture. Psalm 136:1–3 says *[1] Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. [2] Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. [3] Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever.* The phrase ‘for his steadfast love endures forever’ is in every single verse in Psalm 136. That’s just the tip of the iceberg. There are all kinds of Scripture that admonish those ten lepers that they should have been thankful more than they were.

Think how much more we should be thankful. We not only have the Psalms but we have so many verses in the New Testament that remind us of the need and example of being thankful. There is II Corinthians 2:14 which says, *[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.* Paul was thrilled that he and us are the sweet fragrance of the knowledge of Christ before a stinking world. What a privilege to have that ministry in our lives.

Hebrews 12:28 says *[28] Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.* It is amazing to contemplate the fact of what God has planned for us. We are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. We are in a world that can be shaken and is crumbling around us but we have a Kingdom that cannot be shaken no matter what happens in our lives because of what Christ has done. That is thanksgiving material friends and there are plenty of reasons to be thankful.

I Thessalonians 5:16–18 says *[16] Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* Then in Ephesians 5 a companion verse to this, Paul commands us to be filled with the Spirit and then says this in Ephesians 5:19–20, *[19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, [20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The last two passages are especially challenging to us because it’s pushing us into a very mysterious area for even in the midst of trial and tribulation we’re to give thanks. I don’t think we necessarily need to quibble about prepositions because we realize that both verses were written by a man who had lost everything, who had been persecuted severely, beaten and imprisoned and in a short time anticipated his execution. This was a man who had every reason in the world to say ‘I’ve been dealt an unfair deck. God You’re not dealing rightly with me. I’m relentlessly faithful and look what has happened to me as I’ve been pummeled, persecuted and opposed in city, after city, after city.’ Yet he has the amazing ability to say be thankful in all circumstances, always giving thanks in everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We should agree that both verses are there intentionally. Both verses are inspired and I would suggest that both verses are very much needed by you and me for a couple of reasons. One, both verses point us in the right direction when it comes to being thankful. When something bad happens we might say ‘there is no way I could ever be thankful for something like that’ and I understand that but these verse don’t ask us to be thankful. These verses tell us to give thanks. Being thankful is in a sense a response of our emotions. Giving thanks is an act of our will. The Bible doesn’t say that we necessarily appreciate everything but we give thanks in everything.

Our society insists that we are emotionally driven people and this seems more and more in the last few decades where we have become an emotionally driven culture. People say that emotions should dictate what we do, how we think and how we behave. For instance, it's a done deal if I don't feel love for my spouse anymore then we're free to move on because we can't go against our emotions. If I really feel I need that \$2,000 computer or that \$300,000 sports car then I should go and get it, regardless of the fact that I can't possibly afford it. We live in a culture that more and more says that if I feel like a female today then that's the way it is, regardless of my biological gender. This just goes on and on where we are dictated by our feelings.

That is not the way Scripture approaches decision making at all. In fact, Joni Eareckson Tada, who is one of my heroes, says 'giving thanks is not a matter of feeling thankful, but it is a matter of obedience.' She is right. Biblically speaking, not feeling thankful doesn't exempt us from the Spirit-filled obligation of giving thanks. That is why those verses are needed because they point us in the right direction but secondly it is also because they are necessary. God knows that in the midst of tragedy, disappointment and the everyday stresses of life that thankfulness may seem impossible. He knows that it may take time for us to be thankful because it may unfold over a period of months or years. It may take us time to first be thankful in something and maybe even for something someday.

I know we have all had something bad happen to us where you were frustrated or disappointed or hurt or embarrassed but then you find as time passes and God works, you have learned a couple of lessons going through it. So that maybe in a couple of weeks or months or years you say 'my, that was really good that happened. I appreciate God kind of waking me up or rattling my cage with that little bit of adversity He brought into my life.' I know there are people who have had deep times of problems or losses or hardships and in those times I still think the Biblical thankfulness is something that we do.

We can always be thankful for a number of things. Number one is that God is sovereign in our lives. Nothing in my life is beyond His knowledge or out of His gracious control. He has numbered the hairs on my head. Psalm 139:3-4 says [3] *You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.* [4] *Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.* What a blessing! That is thanksgiving material.

Secondly, we can always be thankful that God has saved us. The hymn *Rock of Ages* says 'nothing in my hand I bring' and that's ok that I don't have anything in my hands. I have nothing to offer God or to merit His grace. My salvation rests alone on the perfect Person, work and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Therefore as the hymn continues, 'simply to the cross I cling,' I can love the unlovable. I can forgive the unforgivable and someday maybe I can thank God for the unthinkable because He is working in me.

Thirdly, we're thankful that Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell me. That Holy Spirit can pray in and through me with words that I can't even pray. Lord Jesus, I can't pray right now, will the Spirit pray for me and through me? That is what the Spirit promises to do. Therefore I can know love and joy. I can experience peace and show patience and kindness. I can share goodness and be faithful. I can demonstrate self-control. That is thanksgiving material.

Number four, is that all things work together for my good. Romans 8:28 says [28] *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* He doesn't say that all things are good but that all things work together for good. In the next verse we learn the key to this. Romans 8:29 says [29] *For those*

whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. He uses all things to conform us to image of Christ. That is His whole point – that we become Christ-like in every kind of possible trial and tribulation. Given the fact we know the writer of this, the Apostle Paul, we're amazed at His confidence in the way God worked in His life for good.

Fifthly, we know that God can heal us of all hurt, grief and pain. He can make our lives new. In fact, I'm convinced that thanksgiving is one of those keys to making my life miraculous. It is something that is very counterintuitive. That is one way Christians stand out so starkly in a fallen world. It is not because we're prudish or hyper-moralistic in some ways but we're thankful when people don't ought to think we should be thankful. It is a powerful lesson.

Matthew Henry, the great commentator who lived in the 18th century was once accosted by robbers and mugged when he was in London. Though it was no doubt a traumatic experience he later wrote this to a friend of his about this experience. "Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed." This is very insightful even in the midst of a very disappointing occasion.

Does thanksgiving mean that I don't mourn, grieve or cry? No, that's nonsense. Mourning, grieving and crying are very Biblical responses to the trauma, sadness and bad times of this life. In fact, it is part of God's healing process. We do grieve but we don't grieve as those who have no hope. We do weep just as our Savior wept, standing outside the tomb of Lazarus. Being thankful doesn't mean we don't practice those very Biblical responses but at the same time the more we give thanks to God in all of our circumstances, I believe, I will be more grateful for all that God has brought into my life. It may take time or may take most of a lifetime but let us never limit what God can do through you and me. He wants us to be a miraculous demonstration of His grace. I dare not try to come up with excuses that I get a pass on this one where I say 'this situation was just too bad God, I'm ticked and that's just the way it's going to be.' We don't need to take that response as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Going back to Joni Eareckson Tada who I said earlier is one of my heroes. She has spoken here at Briarwood on several occasions. You probably know her story. She was paralyzed and became a quadriplegic as an 18 year old. She has lived a life basically in a wheelchair but God has astonishingly blessed her life and used her to bless all of us if you have read any of her books. I recall hearing her speak at our General Assembly a few years ago and she said that she is thankful for the accident that cost her, her freedom. I just about fell out of my seat when I heard her say that and thought 'I wonder if anyone else is really listening to what she just said?' She was up on this platform, this unique person, far superior to anyone else and I thought 'that's not where I live.' To the contrary, she is exactly where we all live. That wasn't a thanksgiving that came right away for God worked for years in her life to bring her to that point and He wants to work in our life as well. He wants to work a miracle in us.

Was that Jesus' concern about the lepers? I'd say maybe a little bit but that's not the main thing. Jesus was not concerned about their cultural insensitivity nor do I think it was primarily spiritual ignorance. They should have known the Scripture. They should have known to come back and express appreciation for what Jesus did but I don't really think that's the issue either. There is something else. What did Jesus see that confirmed that the one leper did what was right? Jesus' response is very instructive to him in Luke 11:19 which says [19] *And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."*

We have no record that Jesus personally knew this man. He didn't know his background or family or what caused his leprosy. He knew very little about the man except He saw his faith. What did Jesus see because He didn't hear his testimony? He didn't know about this leper's religious background at all. All He knew was that this man was thankful as He watched this man bow down to Him. The lesson for me is that thankfulness is essential for saving faith to be real. That is what Jesus saw – his thankfulness.

Interestingly, thankfulness is not a fruit of the Spirit. It is something more basic, more fundamental, where we come from and it is an expression and statement of faith. In coming to Jesus that Samaritan basically said first, I know who is Boss in the world. He was recognizing God. We see this in Luke 11:15 which says *[15] Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.* The Samaritan connected this with God. He understood more of God being Boss in the world, over his problems and his diseases. He knew he was being healed by the hand of God. This was the sovereign God who was Lord of creation and Lord of him.

Secondly, we see that this man knew his own unworthiness. In Luke 11:16 it says the man fell on his face. He knew he didn't deserve it. He knew that none of those men deserved it but he fell on his face as a sign of submission and repentance.

Thirdly, he knew his need for Jesus Christ. He came to Jesus' feet and gave Him thanksgiving. He didn't come back simply to give a 'high-five in the end zone' or to celebrate but he was coming back to bow down in worship and give God the glory.

Do you know what this is? This is the Gospel. It is recognizing that God is Boss in the world, recognizing our own need and recognizing the sufficiency of Christ to take care of me. This man embraced Christ in a powerful way through the Gospel. Jesus looking at the appreciation said 'I see your faith, arise and go for your faith has made you well.' This is remarkable because the others got their blessing, their miracle, their physical healing, but they went their way afterward and that's all they wanted.

Being blessed by Jesus Christ is not the same as knowing Jesus Christ. Unfortunately there are probably many who grow up in Briarwood Christian School and they want to be blessed by God so they will walk an aisle. They want to find the right spouse so they will walk the aisle and profess Christ. They want to have the right friends and the right lifestyle and in a sense there is nothing wrong with that but that is not what being a Christian is. A Christian is recognizing my need for Christ and my complete indebtedness to God and trusting in Him as my Lord and Savior. All these men were healed on the outside but only one received long term healing on the inside. That is why Jesus was distressed.

These men went away with their miracle, their blessing, their healing but they didn't leave with faith in Christ. I'm concerned that the church is filled with people who are professing to be Christians because they have gotten their blessing or felt the blessing of Christ but they are really the nine lepers who have left without being blessed on the inside. Jesus said 'your faith has made you well' and his thanksgiving is what confirmed his faith.

How is that essential to me? I'd like to close by looking at one more passage and that is Romans 1. In many ways Romans 1 is a very sad picture of those who do not understand the knowledge of God, suppress the knowledge of God and reject the Biblical knowledge of God and as a result three things happen. Listen for those three things in Romans 1:22–28 which says *[22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

[24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26] For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

[28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

One is that God gave them up to the impurity in their hearts. Two God gave them up to dishonorable passions. You can see the cycle of how they are going down, down, down. And three, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. This gives us a tragic picture of what happens when one pushes back and denies the Biblical knowledge of God for their lives just keep spiraling down, down, down. We see it all around us. Some of you were snatch from that downward spiral by Christ and for that you are eternally thankful but it's interesting to see where the decline starts. Let's go back one verse.

Romans 1:21 says *[21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* Apparently what opened the floodgates of depravity in people is the absence of Biblical thanksgiving. It is that important. It is that fundamental. Thanksgiving isn't just an additive to the side of our life to make us more appealing to others, more culturally adaptive and more Scriptural in our behavior but it's a fundamental sign of saving faith.

Here is a provocative question. Is thankfulness *an* essential sign of saving faith or is thankfulness *the* essential sign of saving faith? Luke teaches us from this text that ingratitude is unbelief. So I'm believing here that when Jesus watched those nine lepers go away was very sad and alarmed at what that was saying about their relationship with Him because thanksgiving is an essential sign of faith and when it's present it's a powerful sign of faith – perhaps one of the most powerful signs of faith that we have in our arsenal. When I come before the church in my membership vows I can fake it. I can academically articulate the Gospel. I can recite items from a testimony when I walk the aisle or when my life was changed but the real sign of saving faith is something that probably elders can never tell when someone is being interviewed for church membership. It is where a person's heart is. Is it a heart of thanksgiving that wells up in appreciation because of what Christ has done for them?

So when my daughter is urging her daughter Lucy to 'pease' and 'tank you' she is not helping her just to be culturally sensitive or Scripturally knowledgeable, but she is preparing her to know Jesus. That is why she is instilling appreciation in that little girl because that will be the greatest demonstration I believe that she does know Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I know that at least someone reading this has experienced severe trauma and great disappointment. Perhaps expectations have not worked out like they had hoped or they are struggling with issues of health or pain is intense in some area of their life. Lord, we don't deal with this lightly but what an astonishing picture it is when we come to Scripture and see someone like the Apostle Paul who knew much pain, sorrow, trauma and disappointment from other people, yet he could be so fearless in demanding, encouraging, in sighting us to be thankful in our relationship with Christ in the midst of all kinds of circumstances. Lord, perhaps Paul

understood the importance of why You so disappointed when those lepers left. Thank You so much for the privilege we have of being freed from the bonds of this world by having thankful hearts before You. I thank You for this privilege of having a powerful testimony of thanksgiving before our family members and friends who aren't thankful at all. I pray Lord that You would make us a thankful congregation and that it might be an element of the revival that You are bringing to Your church, not only in Birmingham, but in our nation and around the world. Lord, I thank You for this powerful Word from You and I ask that You would work in each one of us to make us a miracle of gratitude. Lord Jesus, I thank You for all You have done. Continue to use us for Your glory for we pray this in Jesus' Name and for His sake, Amen.

Power Point

Jesus' Concern. What is Jesus' point?

What is His problem with the leper's response?

A. Maybe it showed cultural insensitivity.

Thankfulness is important for...

1. Social reasons;
2. Personal reasons.

What is His problem with their response?

B. Maybe it showed Scriptural ignorance.

They should have known...

Psalm 28:6-7 "Blessed be the Lord! For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him."

Psalm 30:4-5 "Sing praises to the Lord, O you His saints, and give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."

Psalm 136:1 "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever."

We should know...

II Cor. 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."

Hebrews 12:28 "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe...."

We should know...

I Thess. 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."

Eph. 5:18–20 “...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

These verses are inspired, intentional and needed...

- a. Both verses point us in the right direction;
- b. Both verses are necessary.

These verses are inspired, intentional and needed...

- a. Both verses are necessary. We can be thankful
 - (1) That God is sovereign;
 - (2) That God has saved me;
 - (3) That Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell me;
 - (4) That “all things” work together for my good;
 - (5) That God can heal me of all hurt and grief and pain.

Jesus’ Perspective.

Luke 17:19 “...your faith has made you well”

Thankfulness is essential for saving faith to be real.

In thanking Jesus this Samaritan said...

- A. “I know who is Boss in the world.”
- B. “I know my own unworthiness.”
- C. “I know my need for Jesus Christ.”

Romans 1:22–28

22 “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals....

24 God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...

26 For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions....

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”

Romans 1:21

“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”