

Return and Give Praise: Jesus and the Ten Lepers

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I want to say thanks to the praise team. I can't think of a better way to ring in the New Year than to be singing. Great is thy faithfulness. What a good word for us. A couple of things I just want to say I am glad of all the places that I could be that I am with you tonight, a group of people who would think that the best way to celebrate New Year's Eve is by opening God's Word and worshipping together. And this is the pre-party party to your New Year's Eve. And for those of you that want to know, I mean, I'll be here for. I've been instructed to preach for the next five and a half hours until the ball drops. There's actually a ball that drops down from the middle of the room. So I you need to gear up. I'll probably be done about 5 hours before midnight. So, you'll have time for other things. 😊 But I'd love for you to open your Bibles to the story of Jesus and the ten lepers in Luke. Chapter 17. We're going to read this story together.

This is the word of God.

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers,^[a] who stood at a distance ¹³and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."^[b]

The grass withers and the flower fades with the word of our God stands forever. Will you pray with me one more time?

Father, we thank you for your Word. We trust that it will not return void. We pray that it will bear fruit in us and that your Holy Spirit will apply it to us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Well, thinking about tonight, we stand at the precipice of a new year, which means we have 364.75 days to look back on right now in 2023 and a little bit of time, I think, naturally to stop and reflect. And this is something that's really important.

There are turning points in all of our lives. There are those moments that formed significant turning points. When you graduate a grade of school, you graduate college, you start a new job. When you get married, when you have your first child, you go to your first funeral. There are moments that can be significant turning points, and sometimes those turning points aren't

clearly marked. But I think it is helpful when there's a clear marker like the end of one year and the start of a new year to say, hey, this is a good time for us to kind of take stock of how the year has gone. What did we like about 2023? What did we like about the way we lived this year? What did we learn from God? And what would we maybe want to do differently in 2024? I heard the illustration that, you know, we're all kind of naturally like a car that's a little bit out of alignment. And if you've ever had that, you know, you kind of let go of the wheel and it just kind of starts moving towards one side or the other of the street. And if you just left it that way, you'd be in a ditch before too long. And so you have to make these little micro steering adjustments when your car is out of alignment to keep yourself in the middle of the road. And I think that that's what these kinds of moments really can be for a lot of us.

Now, some of us, when we take stock of our lives, we're realizing this isn't a micro steering adjustment. We've got to turn the wheel pretty hard to get back pointed in the direction that God is calling us to be. But whether you're in a micro steering or a major steering adjustment tonight, I think this story of Jesus and the ten lepers can be helpful for us because this was a very clear turning point in the lives of these ten men.

And I think it can be for us as well. So just real brief outline, just to give you for those you the like outlines. This is going to be all you're going to see all night. So I don't want you to panic for those that like structure, the basic outline. I'm going to walk through the text. We're just going to look at it verse by verse, and you kind of know when we're done because there's no more text. But the basic outline is this. There is the **setting**, then there's a **request** and then there's a **response**, and then there's the **outcome** of the story. So I'm going to walk through that and I'm going to make two applications at the end and then we'll be done. And Lord willing, it'll been a profitable time. So I just want to start by the first observation in the first verse Luke 17:11, *on the way to Jerusalem, he, (that's Jesus) was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.* So you've got to picture Galilee. That's where Capernaum was Nazareth, the ten cities, what they called the Decapolis. That was the place where Jesus did a lot of his public ministry. And so he was moving from there down to Jerusalem and he's traveling through and it says he's traveling along the border of Samaria. If you picture Galilee is up here by the Sea of Galilee, and then there's the Jordan River that goes down to the Dead Sea and Jerusalem is down here. So he's maybe halfway there and he's passing along the border of Samaria. And that's going to be important later in the story. But for us, this is the application I want us to see immediately. This entire story takes place while Jesus is on his way to somewhere else. And that's really important because I can be so tunnel vision oriented in my life that I really am just trying to get going where I'm going and I'm missing things along the way.

And Jesus was never like that. He was never like that. You think even of the story of Jairus daughter who dies and Jesus says, I'll go and heal her? And he goes with Jairus. And on the way he heals a woman who's had bleeding for 12 years. And if you look at the life of Jesus, one of the things we see constantly is the fact that he was faithfully always looking for people and open to whatever interruptions his father might have for him.

So the first point I want us to take away from this story is the fact that this story is almost a parenthesis in between Jesus journey from one place to another. And for me it's really instructive to say, God, what do you want me to do on the way to the things I'm doing? And am I open to listening to you if you interrupt my plans with something completely different and this amazing miracle that takes place is basically an interruption in his plan. And so one of the things that I pray as we close 2023 and move into 2024 is, Lord, make me more open to divine interruptions that they could be the most important thing that happens to me and that I don't need to be so focused on my goal that I miss that he's doing something amazing along the way. Okay, so that's our first observation. Jesus passing from Galilee as he's going to Jerusalem and he comes to a town says in verse 12, and as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers. Now, this is significant. Just a lot of you've heard background about leprosy. But we have to remember today, I mean, nowadays people can cure leprosy through through medications and things. But back then it was an incurable terminal disease. And even worse than that, because it was contagious, it made you a lifelong public outcast. So these ten lepers stand at a distance because that was the appropriate thing to do. We're not going to get near you or indicate that we're going to try to infect you or anything. And they stand at a distance. These lepers, during this time, the Jews believed that if people were sick, they were sick because of sin, either the sin of the individual or the sin possibly of their family. But they believed that they were cursed for a reason. You remember, John 9 when the disciples see a blind man and they go to Jesus and they see Jesus who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind. And Jesus says, I tell you the truth, neither this man nor his parents, but that the works of God might be revealed in him. And so understand that the mindset of people in that day was that these lepers, by virtue of being sick, were already great sinners. And so they do something that's kind of shocking in that regard. If you would have reflected on them that way. They do something shocking. They're calling out and they make a request to Jesus. And their request is this -- Jesus master, have mercy on us. And I was I was looking up this word just to kind of make sure I understood it. You know, the word master there is just very clearly a generic term of respect for someone in authority. The disciples sometimes used it with Jesus, but it was it was basically somebody who has authority. They call out to Jesus and they're showing him respect. Jesus, master. They're putting themselves under him in terms of authority. And they say, have mercy on us. Now, that in and of itself is remarkable. And that's maybe even more respectful and shows more belief in Jesus than the word master, because there's nothing you can really do for someone who has leprosy in that day. It's a death sentence. There's nothing to fix it. But they maybe have heard some stories about Jesus. Maybe they've heard some of the things that Jesus has done for other people, and they're hopeful that maybe Jesus can do something when nobody can do anything to help them, but they think maybe Jesus can. And I just want to point out the word that they use Master. They use the word master. They don't use the word Messiah. They don't call him the son of David, like the blind man when Jesus was passing through Jericho, a chapter later. They use this term because it's very likely they didn't know really all that Jesus was. They didn't really know who He was yet, but they knew he was a miracle worker or they'd heard stories and they were hopeful. And here's the application I want to make from that. There are people all

around us who don't know a lot about God, but they're in trouble and they need help. I was thinking about it a lot with Pastor Greg Norfleet preaching this morning in the sermon because counseling is one of those places where, you know, they get to see a lot of people who come into the church looking for help. Maybe their marriage is struggling. Maybe there's there's a problem in an area that they just don't know how to fix. But the thing I would say is that prayerfully, I would hope another application for us in 2024 would be God help me to have eyes open for people who maybe don't know the right words. They don't know when to sit and when to stand and when to bow their heads in prayer. They don't fit in with the church crowd, but they're needy and they clearly need God and they're looking for hope. And Jesus has come to this village, I believe, specifically for the purpose of bringing hope. So maybe we can pray to have our eyes more open to those people around us that we could give hope to in 2024. So they make this request. Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And here's Jesus verse 14. When he saw them, he said to them, Go and show yourselves to the priests. He sees them and he responds to them. And it's interesting, nowhere in there does he indicate that he's going to heal them. He doesn't raise his hands over them and pray over them. He doesn't make a paste of mud like he did with the blind man and put it on his eyes. He doesn't lift his eyes up to heaven. So all the things that you might expect a miracle worker to do, he doesn't do any of that. And instead he gives them a command. He gives them a command. Go and show yourselves to the priests. He doesn't even give them the hope or the promise that go show yourselves to the priests and you will be healed. And I think that's really important, instructive for us, because of this. There are a lot of times when I go to Jesus and I ask him for help, and the answers he gives me don't immediately make sense to me. It doesn't immediately solve my felt need. And that's really important for us to expect when we go to God in prayer, is that sometimes He will talk to us about something that is entirely different than what we expected. And because we know the end of this story, we know that when Jesus was telling them to go and show themselves to the priests, a couple of things in mind -- he does intend to heal them and he wants the priests to see this so that the blessing of what he's about to do will reach the priests and maybe stimulate them to ask questions that might lead to them to believe. But the second thing is simply when Jesus answers you like that, do you obey him? Do you trust him enough to obey him when you don't understand what he's doing? Because there are lots of times where all God gives us is the next few steps in our journey and the step after it sometimes looks like a step into the dark or the step off a cliff and we have to trust him and believe him at those moments because God is building something in us through the process of faith and trust in Him. So he says, Go and show yourselves to the priests. And what's so amazing about this story is their immediate obedience. Look at the next verse. And as they went, they were cleansed. And here's the faith. If they go on this journey to the priests and if they get there and they're still lepers, they're not going to be admitted to the temple. You're not welcome to come before a priest or into the temple or the synagogue. In their case. You're not welcome to come there if you're a leper. So the very act of going is an act of faith and an act of trust.

And it says that as they go, they're cleansed. God heals them. All ten of them are cleansed. And it would be really tempting to think at this point, this is a good little story. There's a good story. We got Jesus walking. You know, he's passing through a village. Ten people kind of flagged him down. He hears what they need. He tells them to do something. They do it, they get healed. End of story. That could easily be the end of a story right there. But it's really the beginning of the key part of our story. These ten people are cleansed of their leprosy at a time when nobody gets cleansed of leprosy. So what happens next? Verse 15.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, he turned back, praising God with a loud voice. One of the songs we sang talked about praising God with a loud voice. You know, God deserves more than our polite praise. He deserves people who like David as David was celebrating as the Ark was being brought into Jerusalem, he was dancing so that his wife Micah, despised him and thought he made a fool of himself because of how excited he was in his praise that the Ark of God was entering Jerusalem and finding its place of rest there.

How important is that? That we not care more about our dignity than about whether or not God receives the praise He deserves? So he's praising in a loud voice, and he fell on his face at Jesus feet, giving him thanks. And up until this point, Luke is kind of holding back a piece of the story that's really supposed to blow our minds.

This man who comes back and he's praising God in a loud voice and he falls at Jesus feet and gives him thanks. The next line should be earth shaking for us says now he was a Samaritan. Unfortunately, today, because we have grown up with the story of the parable of the Good Samaritan, it just doesn't land on us with the proper force the way it should, because we think of Samaritans as just another group of people.

But in the Jewish day, we have to keep reminding ourselves that in the Jewish day, the Jewish teachers saw the Samaritans as cursed half breeds. They were a mixture of Assyrian peoples and Jewish peoples who had come together after the exile and resettled in the northern part of Israel what became Samaria and they not only merged racially, but they also merged their religions. They were syncretic. That's when they kind of take a little bit of one religion and a little bit of another religion, and they put it together. And so these people were viewed as cursed by God and forsaken. And I'm trying to think of what a modern example would be. I mean, today, I don't know, maybe this would be significant if you were to say ten men were healed and the one that came back to Jesus was a Muslim cleric.

You know, that's what happens. This is the guy that responds is the Samaritan. He comes to Jesus and he bows down at his feet and he gives him thanks. And one of the things I want to think about here is what Jesus says next. He says in verse 17, Then Jesus answered, We're not ten cleansed. Where are the nine?

It's interesting because this man came back to thank Jesus, to praise God, and none of that was instructed. All Jesus said was go and show yourselves to the priests. And so you can say, well, they were all just kind of doing what they were told. They got healed. They were going to go

show themselves to the priests. But there's something instinctive in this one man that is important for us, that when he gets healed, he simply cannot stop but to go back and to praise God and to give Jesus thanks for the mercy that was shown to him. It wasn't commanded, but it was right. There are things in our lives that may not be commanded, but they're right. And only you and God can really know what those things are. And so as he goes back and as he says his thanks to God, I want just one thing to draw out from this. And we're going to talk about this a little bit more at the end, but there is a difference between gratitude and expressing gratitude or being happy about your circumstances and expressing gratitude. There's a difference between those two things. You can be really happy about your circumstances, but that's not the same thing as expressing Thanksgiving. And so we see the difference here.

What do you think about these ten men? Do you think that all ten of them were happy about being healed? Yeah. Yeah, I think so, too. I think all ten of them were ecstatic what that meant for their lives, that they could go back to their families, that they could be restored to normal society, that they wouldn't die a slow, withering death from this miserable disease. All of those things are reasons that I'm sure they were very, very happy. But it's different. Being happy is not the same as expressing thanks and praise and gratitude. And so that kind of leads to a really important question What keeps us from expressing gratitude to God? There are a lot of different reasons I really thought about this as I was praying in preparation for tonight.

What are the things that keep us from expressing gratitude to God? The first one that popped into my mind was a lot of times I'm too busy. I'll share a silly example from this week was with my family this week. My son had lost his watch it, bought it with his own money. It was a really important watch and he had looked for it for days and not found it and said, We're going to pray and ask God for help in finding this watch. And as a family, we all prayed together before we hunted for this watch and we we hunted high and low in the house, in the closets, in places we hadn't been in a long time. And we didn't find it. Went on a walk, still kind of thinking about this, and somebody said something that triggered a memory that triggered another memory that led to us checking the pouch in my wife's car where we found his watch.

And we were all really happy about that. So happy. And 10 minutes later, I'm up in our attic doing something else, and I've moved on to the next thing and busyness is an absolute killer for gratitude and expressing thankfulness to God. And I had to stop myself in that attic and say, God, I am so grateful that you showed mercy to us and helped us to find that watch.

It's so easy for us with busyness. And when I really thought about it, what's the problem with busyness? It's not just, I've got a lot going on. But what we're actually saying is I kind of think it all depends on me. You know, Bruce delivered a really good reflection for the Christmas Eve service and the difference between Mary and Martha, and they're serving the problem.

Why the reason why we need to answer this, by the way, is we will not develop lives of gratitude, lives where we consistently give thanks to God and praise to God until we figure out why we don't. If we don't figure out why we don't give praise to God, we will continue in the

same habits. Even if we know we should. It's kind of like flossing. Everybody knows that they're supposed to floss. Why are you not flossing more? I'm sure your dentist is probably said it to you this year. We need to know why we don't do something and understand what the obstacle is. And I think at the root cause of my busyness in failing to show thanks to God is a constant feeling that I've got to make it happen or it won't happen.

And I don't know. That maybe runs into the second reason – Pride - Well, I kind of think I was the one that did it. So I don't want to give gratitude to God because I felt like there was something about what I did that that caused the situation to turn out well. So we don't praise God because we kind of want to praise ourselves.

Or it could be shame. Maybe we just feel ashamed that we have sinned and we just feel like God doesn't want to talk to us. And somehow if we even go and talk to him, we're going to mess it up and he's going to take away the blessing. Rick and Bubba occasionally say, You can't have nothing, right? That's a dangerous philosophy because in Christ you have all the blessings and abundance and riches and mercy of God.

But whatever it is, I think there's probably half a dozen other reasons. But whatever it is that keeps us from expressing gratitude to God, I think we need to take time to even reflect in the last 5 hours of 2023. What is it that's keeping me from expressing my thankfulness to God? More significantly, for all He is doing and has done for me?

Okay, so Jesus commends the man. Again back to verse 18. He says, Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? And he said to him, Rise and go your way, for your faith has made you well. Now this man, because he's been praising God, he clearly knows it's not his faith that healed him. He's not saved by how hard he believes. He saved by the substance of his faith and the substance of his faith is he put his hope in Jesus. He asked Jesus for help and Jesus helped him. And the same is true for us, right? We don't just put our faith in faith. We don't believe really hard. And then it happens. But because we believe in the one who has the power to move heaven and earth, we're made well. And so this man says, Your faith has made you well. Jesus heals him. But this man believed and here's the second key thing. There are ten men in this story, and they all get healed of their leprosy. But one man goes back for more and he gets more. There are plenty of times, especially in the book of John, this is a good study for you to do if you're interested where people believe Jesus for healing, but they're not yet saved. A good example would be John 5, The man by the pool. He gets healed of his crippled legs and then Jesus meets him, you know, ten verses later in 5:15 and says, See, you are well again now stop sinning, lest something worse may happen to you and that man then goes off and tells the Pharisees that it was Jesus who healed him. We don't really know if that man had saving faith or not. We don't know. But one of the priorities of the Gospel of John definitely is don't just believe in Jesus because he's a miracle worker. Believe in Jesus because he's the Son of God.

And so this one man that goes back all ten of them got healed of leprosy. But it may be that only that one that went back to Jesus discovered that he was not only the miracle worker from Galilee, but that he was actually the Son of God as well. And so I just have two short applications that I'd love to kind of tease out with you tonight.

This was a key turning point in the lives of these ten men, but it was even more so in the life of of the one that went back to Jesus. So I want to think about these two things and think about how you could maybe spend the last 5 hours tonight. Probably you spend some of those sleeping, but the time, even tomorrow, the first day of 2024, that's a significant thing.

First days are significant. And so here's the first one. Basic application. I think it's a simple principle from this text that God likes to be thanked. You want to know the things that God likes. One of them, I think he likes for people to appreciate his goodness and his kindness to them. God likes to be thanked. Jesus treats this man with a very positive light because I think he feels like this man has done well.

He's done right. He's praised God loudly. He's fallen at Jesus' feet. This man praises God. And I think that God likes to be thanked for all that He's done. And really, when you think about it, I Corinthians 4:7 says, What do you have that you didn't receive? There's nothing the physical health that I have, the life that I have in my body, the parents that I was given, the home that I have, the skills that I have, there's nothing in my life that wasn't given to me by God and therefore properly a reason for me to praise God and to thank God for it.

So the first category of things we can thank God for are those kinds of things. Things that are obvious goods in and of themselves. You're happy because you're healthy, you're happy because you're out of debt and you're happy because you have a good job, that you have a wife or a husband that loves you, children that are walking with the Lord, you know, that's category one. Those are all good things and we ought to praise God for them.

The second categories a little harder. But I think even maybe more important, which is can we thank God for things that have been difficult? A simple example of this I was thinking about and reading through Acts right now in my devotional time, and I just read this past week about the disciples, they all get arrested and they're standing before the Sanhedrin. These are the same people that killed Jesus about two months ago, and they're standing before the Sanhedrin and the Sanhedrin is threatening them not to speak in the name of Jesus. And in response, they say, judge for yourselves whether it's right to obey men rather than God. And then what do they do? They speak about Jesus directly to the people, telling them not to speak about Jesus. And they tell him the whole story. You know that you put him to death on a tree, but God raised him from the dead and says the Sanhedrin was furious and they all wanted to kill these men. And Gamaliel manages to restrain them. This kind of moderate Pharisee manages to restrain them, and they end up just whipping him really bad. And Acts 5:41 says they went on their way, rejoicing. This is the day they have been whipped and beaten brutally, and the disciples go on their way, rejoicing that they've been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. So, the

second category of things we can thank God for are things like that. Like God, this doesn't feel good right now, but you're using me in your plan. I am thankful for that. Thank you for using me. Thank you for being at work in my life. Thank you that even if by having faith and trusting you in a moment of personal misery, I can point to you in a moment like that that you would use me to help others trust you who are in similar places.

It's oftentimes through the hardest things that we go through that God is most glorified. And if we could be like the disciples and actually thank God for those hard circumstances that we might rather not have, that would be significant. Think about the Apostle Paul. II Corinthians 12. Paul tells the Corinthians about his thorn. I don't know what that thorn was. It could have been a physical affliction, some kind of heavy burden, but whatever it was, Paul sure felt his life would have been better if it could have been avoided, says three times. I pleaded with the Lord that he would take it from me. But the Lord said to Paul, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

So what's Paul's response? Therefore, I will boast all the more in weaknesses, in insults, in persecutions, in sufferings, so that Christ power might rest on me for when I am weak I'm strong. And so that was the Apostle Paul's philosophy. Those things. Maybe it's a chronic illness in your life, maybe it's a relationship in your life that just won't ever get healed. Maybe it's a situation that for whatever reason you just can't seem to escape from. But whatever that is, the Apostle Paul said, I will rejoice in my weaknesses, in my sufferings. Why? So that Christ power can rest on me in those very areas that I feel so inadequate. Those are the areas that God loves to take and in pour glory through for the whole world to see. And so we need to thank God for those difficult things as well. And in those ways he'll get even more glory.

And then the last application I want to make tonight is just like the one leper, the cleansed, healed Samaritan. We should not stop at thanking Jesus, but we should go back to Jesus for 2024. So tonight, I hope you'll say a prayer of Thanksgiving for all that God has done for you even if the main thing you can genuinely thank and praise God for is God. Thank you that I made it to the end of 2023. Thank you. That I survived. But once you get to the point where you've thanked God for all that He has done for you this year, the second piece is to turn the page and to say, God, what do you have in store now? I want to learn what you have for me to do today. And I'm excited about 2024 because as long as you're with me, then 2024 is going to be very important and I can't do anything but Lord, you can do everything. And so I'm excited to go back to you for 2024 to trust you in this New Year, to work in me, things that maybe you've never worked in to me. Maybe you're 80 years old today, but maybe there's some amazing piece of growing, some piece of ministry, some opportunity -- looking at my friend Bill, he's like 93, and he's probably doing more ministry than half the people put together in our church. And I sit here and think about how God is doing amazing things. Don't let your age or any other obstacle be a hindrance but say If I trust you 2024 could be amazing. Don't just be content with what God's done. Briarwood, let's not sit back on our laurels. Let's not sit back on what has happened or what has gone before. Let's pray God, let there be a new day of life and ministry in

our church, in our community. God, I believe you want to do great things in this New Year. Things that are impossible with men are possible with God and the ten lepers. They didn't know much, but they knew enough to ask Jesus for help in an impossible situation.

And I hope and pray that even if your situation feels impossible tonight, the fact of the matter is we can't. And I love this word. We can't do one thing without God. It's not just that we can only do small things. We can't do anything without God. So why would we try? And then after we attempt great things for God in 2024, I trust will come back here again and thank him again because God loves to be thanked.

Amen? Let's pray.

Father, I thank you so much for your word. I thank you for the truth of your word, which is a fresh every time we read it. And it cuts deeper than soul and spirit joints and marrow the thoughts and intentions of the heart. So, Lord, we come to your word. And as we have drunk from it, I pray God that it would do its surgical work, not just in cutting us and laying us bare, but also in healing us and restoring us. Father, forgive us for our on the thankful hearts. God help us to root out the causes at the root of our ingratitude and to confess them to you. Father, help us to become a thankful and a praising people. And Father, help us to stay close to you as we finish this year. As we start a new year. God, we want to do it with you. We pray that you would do that not just in us personally, but in us corporately, and that you do a great work in Briarwood and in the city of Birmingham and across this world. Lord, we pray and we pray with John, come Lord Jesus. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.