

## A THANKFUL HEART (A SEASON OF GRATITUDE\_ 2)

Today I ask you to turn to **Luke 17:11-19** as we consider an event in Jesus' ministry. Pay particular attention to the expression of gratitude that is found in the text. <sup>11</sup> **Now on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.** <sup>12</sup> **As He was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance** <sup>13</sup> **and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"** <sup>14</sup> **When He saw them, He said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."** **And as they went, they were cleansed.** <sup>15</sup> **One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.** <sup>16</sup> **He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him--and he was a Samaritan.** <sup>17</sup> **Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"** <sup>18</sup> **Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"** <sup>19</sup> **Then He said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."**

We have noted before **the sad state of one who had leprosy** in Jesus' time. They were outcasts\_ quarantined from the rest of society because it was believed that their condition was highly contagious. Even the suspicion of leprosy caused alarm. Everything from eczema to dandruff would have to be closely examined by the priests and extreme measures were taken to prevent an outbreak of infection. I couldn't help but think of those recently diagnosed with Ebola. Though leprosy was not as deadly, it did require isolation from the rest of the community. Yet, unlike Ebola\_ there was no mere incubation period for a leper\_ and no hope for a cure.

Our text tells us that a colony of lepers, evidently with little in common but their illness, **had come as a group to meet Jesus.** "Meet" may not be the most appropriate word since, in keeping with the custom of the day they kept their distance from Him. They called out in unison, **"Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"** This indicates they all had hope that He could somehow ease their suffering, relieve their pain, and even restore them to their loved ones. Of course, sometimes the faith of a few can inspire others to tag along.

Jesus doesn't hesitate, responding with instructions that may sound strange. **"Go, show yourselves to the priests."** It seems He is sending them away or referring them to someone else to get the help they seek. But, that's not what He's doing. **According to the laws** of the time, they must get an official "all clear"\_ a written release to return to their families and friends. Jesus is sending them to get that permission slip to go back to work, which would also be their ticket to gain entrance back into the temple and a welcome back into fellowship with the community of God's people. Jesus is directing them to take the necessary steps to get the stamp of approval they require to get their lives back.

It's amazing to me that they go. Their skin would still be broken and bleeding\_ their clothes sticking to open oozing sores\_ their bodies reeking from the odor of rotting flesh. Certainly the priests would take one look at them and demand that they leave. *"Get away from us."* Yet, these lepers go, however reluctantly\_ just because Jesus said so. That level of desperate faith is rare. That degree of what can only be described as blind obedience is rarer still.

**"And as they went,"** the scripture says, **"they were cleansed."** I've always visualized this as something that happened when they were on the way\_ maybe about ½ ways there. Then I supposed that the band of brothers would've run headlong the rest of the way to the priest\_ knowing now it would not be a wasted trip. A closer look has me rethinking that, now. I cannot say for sure, but it seems as likely, if not even more so that the transformation would have occurred as they, one by one, showed themselves to the priest.

The priests would have had no choice but to pronounce them all to be clean\_ and little recourse other than to praise God for what Jesus had done when they saw lepers healed right in front of the eyes. Though the ten would've been eager to return to their homes, rejoicing in the lives that had been given back to them, the Law of Moses required a 7 day waiting period before they could be fully restored in the community. Still, they could at least visit the doorway of their homes and announce from there they'd be coming home soon. They would be able to see their loved ones with a sure hope of reunion. I'd guess that what they hurried off to do. That is, all but one of them.

**One leper turned around and came back to Jesus.** As he did, he praised God in a loud voice, threw himself down at Jesus' feet, **and thanked Him.** Jesus responded in surprise\_ not necessarily that this man came back to express gratitude, but that the others didn't. He asks **"Where are the nine?"** The ones who went on their merry way were God's covenant people. This man was a Samaritan.

So what are we to learn? First, **though gratitude is something that should come naturally\_** and I personally believe most people feel it from time to time, **we don't always express it.** I suspect that the nine were as glad to be healed as the one who returned. So, why didn't they come back and thank Jesus? Maybe they took it for granted. I don't mean the miracle, but the fact that Jesus would just somehow know how much they appreciated what He'd done. They didn't need to say it for Him to know it, did they? Sadly, believers can be among the least expressive when thanking God.

**Gratitude is not something you can demand.** If you make you kids say "thank you," it might make you feel better, but it really doesn't mean much to the one who knows it's coerced. Don't get me wrong, we need to teach out kids to say "Please" and "Thank you." But, merely enforcing those rules of etiquette won't necessarily produce a thankful heart. But one thing that I have learned in my 63 years is that **Life is better when you are grateful.** Days seem brighter. Burdens seem lighter. And of the 1000's of people I have encountered in life I've also seen this to be true: **It's not happy people who are grateful\_ but grateful people who are happy.**

I suspect that **the one who returned had a thankful heart** even before he was healed. What would he have to be thankful for? Maybe that he had a place to stay even if it was just a leper colony. That he had at least nine friends who were sympathetic to his condition. That he had food to eat and a place to lay his head. That he could still walk and talk and see. That though he couldn't be with those who loved him he at least had people who loved him. It's strange, but **Gratitude turns what we have into enough.** A thankful heart is a contented heart.

Truth is **there's always something to be thankful for.** We can always find reason to express gratitude to God. Noted Bible commentator, **Matthew Henry,** recorded in his diary that he'd been robbed. Yet here's what he wrote about that tragedy. *"I'm thankful I've never been robbed before\_ and that they didn't take my life. Even though they took all I had, it wasn't very much. And what a blessing that I was the one who was robbed\_ and not someone else! Thank you, God, most of all that I've never been so desperate that I would rob anyone myself."* **Even bad things can open our eyes to the good things we overlooked.** That's a good reminder to **count our blessings.** God's children have so much to be grateful than anyone. **May we never be counted among the nine** who forget to thank Him!

So much so in fact that Paul urges us in **Colossians 3:17:** **"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."** Whatever we do? That, my friends, will take an attitude of gratitude. It will take a thankful heart. Let's pray\_