**JESUS BLESSES A THANKFUL MAN**

October 11, 2015

Luke 17:11-19

Key Verse 17:16 “He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.”

Happy Thanksgiving! Why do we celebrate thanksgiving? Does God demand our thanksgiving because he is an insecure egomaniac? No. Thanksgiving is for our sake. There was a man who went to the rabbi and complained, “Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?” The rabbi answered, “Take your goat into the room with you.” The man was puzzled, but the rabbi insisted, “Do as I say and come back in a week.” A week later the man came back looking more troubled than before. “We cannot stand it,” he told the rabbi. “The goat is filthy.” The rabbi then told him, “Go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week.” A radiant man returned to the rabbi a week later, exclaiming, “Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it, now that there’s no goat--only the nine of us.” The situation was the same as at first, but now his perception had changed. He realized that he was blessed to begin with. Not one of us is hungry; not one of us is homeless, but most importantly, we have been given everything through Jesus Christ our Lord. The devil will do his best to keep your mind off the blessings of God. He will constantly tell you how bad you have it, how everything is wrong in your life. When you begin to realize how much you have in God, that you will truly begin to be thankful, and when you are thankful, your heart will be full of joy. An unthankful Christian is a defeated Christian for he has lost his joy.

In today’s passage Jesus heals ten men with leprosy. Jesus thus reveals his divine compassion and almighty power once again. But the story does not end with the healing. One of the ten came back to thank Jesus. Jesus gave him a special blessing. May God help us to give thanks to him so that we may also receive a special blessing.

Look at verses 12-13. “As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’” The phrase “at a distance” indicates that their disease was the real leprosy and not some other skin disease.

Let me briefly explain leprosy. It is also called Hansen’s Disease. It is caused by a bacteria. It attacks the nerves and the skin. They lose fingers and toes. Eyebrows and eyelashes drop out. Their voices become very hoarse. Leviticus 13:45-46 says that those who have leprosy must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” whenever anyone comes close to them. As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.

If it is discovered that you have leprosy, you were then removed from all social contact and the only people you could ever associate with were other lepers. The people you needed most, the loving family and friends, you couldn’t come near. You couldn’t associate with other people in the synagogue or any social environment whatsoever. You were an alien from all of life and left only with others in your same horrific misery. So these were the most miserable of all people, believing that they had been cursed by God and cursed by man as well. Sin is like leprosy. Just as leprosy disfigures our body and makes it ugly, sin disfigures God’s image in us. Because of sin, one who should look like a heavenly prince, looks like an ugly tax collector. Because of sin, one who should like a heavenly princess, looks like a prostitute. Not only that, because of sin, we were outcasts from the Kingdom of God. Like the leper, we too were being destroyed by that which was in our bodies, the law of sin and death.

Even though their voices were hoarse, they gathered their strength and cried out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us.” They were wretched in their leprosy. In their helplessness, they begged Jesus’ pity. What did Jesus do? Look at verse 14a. “When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’” Jesus did not ignore their cry for mercy. Jesus never ignores the cry for mercy. Jesus is the God of mercy who is ready to shed his grace on those who come to him. Jesus did so when he was on his way to Jerusalem to die on the cross.

Look at verse 14 again. “Go and show yourselves to the priest.” Now that seems like a very strange thing to say. Why didn’t he say, “Be healed”? First, Jesus is testing their faith. It may have been a meager faith, but this is a good test. Jesus wanted them to obey first and then receive healing. Jesus wanted them to obey his word by faith. These men came to Jesus to be healed of their leprosy. But Jesus wanted to do more than that. Jesus taught them to trust and obey his word. Jesus taught them to have faith in what they did not see. Jesus had hope for these men with leprosy. Of course, Jesus wanted them to be healed, to marry and live a normal life. But more than that, Jesus wanted them to learn obedient faith and grow spiritually as children of God. According to the Jewish law, after examination by the priests, they could obtain a certificate of recovery and enter society as normal men.

Did they have faith? You wouldn't want to go anywhere near the priest if you still had leprosy. You would be going to the wrong people. You would be going to the health inspectors with your disease. But they had faith in the power and compassion of Jesus because it says in verse 14b, “And as they went, they were cleansed.” The rotting flesh and open sores were suddenly healed and their flesh became clean and healthy. The terrible disease of leprosy was gone. They were healed. It was a miracle. Ten useless men with leprosy were cured and became normal men when they obeyed Jesus’ word. Jesus is the Messiah who heals incurable diseases by his power. Jesus heals any kind of disease when we trust and obey.

Now the miracle must have been astounding. You can imagine them all of a sudden, all ten of them just looking at each other and saying, “Whoa...” They were all overjoyed. They could not believe their eyes. Then out of the 10, there was one who reacted differently than the rest. Look at verse 15, “One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.” He turned around and came back to Jesus. He stopped in his tracks, turned around and came back full of joy, of course, full of amazement, full of wonder. He is trying to process what this meant. Think about all the implications of now being able to go back, family, friends, life. But he saw more than that. He understood the real implications of what had just happened. He had been in the presence of God and he wanted more than physical healing. His heart was longing for a relationship with the divine Healer. He wanted to worship and praise him and thank him. He wanted something more than just a physical healing. He knew enough about the Old Testament to know that God was not just a healer but a Redeemer and primarily a Redeemer and a Savior. He understands the reality of his alienation and need for reconciliation to God. So he comes back and he does three things.

First, he praised God in a loud voice. Perhaps a voice that now was able to do what it hadn't been able to do for years. No more hoarse voice. Now he could cry out with new vocal chords. Second, he threw himself at Jesus’ feet. He doesn’t just praise God. He knew that Jesus was more than a mere man. He worships Jesus. Third, he thanked Jesus. He knew that it was God in Jesus that had given him this gift. He could not restrain his praise, he could not restrain his worship, he could not restrain his thanks. He knew he was in the presence of God.

Look at verses 17-18. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Where are the other nine? I have no doubt that after they were declared clean by the priest, they made their way to be with their family and their friends. To hug and kiss the wife and the children. To visit with Mom and Dad. To talk with friends. Their minds were occupied on all that the blessing brought to their lives. Except one person. He loved his wife and children just as much as the others. He wanted to hug and kiss his wife and children just as much as the others. He wanted to spend time with his friends just as much as the others. He wanted to enjoy the blessing just as much as the others. But he had his priorities in order. He did not get so wrapped up in the blessing that he forgot the blesser. He put family, friends and fellowship on hold so that he could worship the one that made his being with his family and friends possible.

Here is the punch line. “And he was a Samaritan.” The least likely from a Jewish viewpoint to be healed, an outcast. The only reason he could associate with Jews at all was because they were all lepers and their common misery bonded them together. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, they hated each other. Surely no one would expect God to heal a Samaritan. In verse 17-18, Jesus asks three rhetorical questions that drive home an important point of ingratitude and indifference. “Were not all ten cleansed?” Yes, there were ten cleansed. And then he asks a second rhetorical question, “Where are the other nine?” In the original Greek, it would read like, “But the nine, they are where?” They ought to be here, they are where? No answer, presumably they are on the way to the priest. They don’t have any interest in Jesus anymore. They got what they wanted out of him. They have no desire to worship him, no desire to glorify him, no desire to thank him. They don’t see him as God. They don’t fall down and give to him what you only give to God.

The cartoon character, Charlie Brown, gave several suggestions as to why the other nine never returned to give thanks; they reveal a whole lot about human nature. One waited to see if the cure was real; One waited to see if it would last; One said he would see Jesus later; One decided that he had never had leprosy; One said he would have gotten well anyway; One gave the glory to the priests; One said, “O, well, Jesus didn’t really do anything.” One said, “Any rabbi could have done it.” One said, “I was already much improved.”

Look at verse 19. “Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well.’” This is misleading. Everybody was made well, all ten were made well. The correct translation would be, “Your faith has saved you.” When the Samaritan came back and worshiped Jesus, Jesus healed his soul and gave him salvation. This is the second miracle uniquely for this man.

Jesus came to this world to call sinners. Everybody heard the message. Everybody enjoyed the benefit of Jesus’ power. Everybody was amazed at his teaching and his miracles. But only a few came, fell at his feet, glorified him as God, worshiped him, humbled themselves and offered him thanks. The majority were content with fixing their life up a little bit, superficial, temporal. A small group of people wanted him to change their souls, transform their hearts. Here the warning is that you can experience the goodness and common grace of God. You can be blessed by God physically and spiritually. You hear people say that all the time...thank God that I’m healthy, thank God for my job, etc. And you can walk away right into eternal hell. Or you can come back and fall on your face before Jesus Christ and embrace him as your Savior. And the miracle that he did for that one man, he will do for you today.

When we study the Bible, to glorify God or thank God is our divine duty. So Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Paul, the greatest theologian, defines, “to thank God in all circumstances is the will of God for us.” St. Paul was on an evangelistic journey with Silas. When they preached the gospel in Philippi, there was a work of God. At the same time there was a work of Satan. Paul and Silas were arrested and put in jail. They could have cried over their wounds and circumstances. They could have said to God, “Why did you treat us like this after all we did for you?” But they did not. They began to sing hymns to God with a loud voice. They thanked God from the jail. They praised God from the jail. Then God poured out a blessing on them. God opened the prison and gave them a chance to escape. But they did not. They stayed for the sake of the jailer who was about to commit suicide. It led to the conversion of this one man and his family. It produced a marvelous spiritual blessing on the gospel ministry in Philippi. Philippi became the support base for Paul’s missionary journeys.

When we have a thankful heart in any situation, God is most pleased. When we try to count God’s graces one by one, we learn that God’s grace is uncountable. God’s grace is too great to fathom. But we do not remember; rather, we are bitter because of hard life and one or two things that made us bitter. When we thank God and worship him, we can grow spiritually and receive abundant blessing from Christ. May God help each of us offer sincere thanksgiving to God for what he has done and worship him today.