



“The Thankful Leper”  
Luke 17:11-19  
October 27, 2019

Good morning! We are going to be in Luke Chapter 17 and Verses 11 through 19 this morning, where we will receive the story of *The Thankful Leper*.

I want to let you know that we come to a portion of Scripture that I did not want to preach today. It is a portion of Scripture that I really, really like, and it’s lessons are so important for all of us. I have been drawn to it in all the years that I have been reading through the pages of Scripture. However, I did not want to teach and preach this story today. When I was thinking this passage through, I was thinking, *Lord, why couldn’t we have come to this portion of Scripture one month from now. Why couldn’t we be in this text on The Thankful Leper over the Thanksgiving weekend holiday?*

Wouldn’t that have been perfect? But upon further reflection, this is a topic that we need to dive into and to contemplate and to carefully consider not just over the Thanksgiving Holiday. We need to be thinking about a life of gratitude all year long that we might live lives of thankfulness that recognizes all that we have been given in Christ by His grace through faith.

Christians are to be thankful people at all times. Thankfulness is to permeate the Christian life. If filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be distinct in the gratitude that is displayed in and through our lives.

Brothers and sisters, it is not hard to find negative people in this world. Nitpicking and complaining does not take much training. It comes naturally to us, does it not, or is it just me? Likewise, presumptuous people are not hard to find in this world, especially here in Southern California where we have so much. There is so much wealth, yet there seems to be the mindset that we ought to have more than we have been given by the hand of the Almighty God.

In contrast, Christians ought to be those who see the good things that God has given them, above all, the cleansing and the forgiveness of sin that we have received in Christ which benefits us into eternity forever and ever, amen! Christians ought to be thankful people.

This morning we open the Gospel of Luke and I think that we are going to see what a rare jewel true abundant thankfulness really is. We are going to receive an unexpected example of the beauty of a thankful heart and spirit as we read through the story that is before us today.

I am going to read Luke Chapter 17 and Verses 11 through 19:

<sup>11</sup>**On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.**

<sup>12</sup>**And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance <sup>13</sup>and**

**lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” <sup>14</sup>When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup>Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; <sup>16</sup>and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup>Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup>Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” <sup>19</sup>And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”**

Here in this portion of Scripture, Dr. Luke, the author of this text, reminds us in Verse 11 that Jesus was on His march toward Jerusalem. It would seem that the event that is given to us here in this text is something of a flashback in time in the flow of the narrative of Luke.

Verse 11 says here that this event took place at the border of Samaria and Galilee. We know that Jesus had left that region behind. He was approaching Jerusalem where the cross was calling. What we know is that the Samaria/Galilee border was way toward the north where Jesus would have begun His journey.

What we find in Luke’s account is that every now and then, he would splice in something in that would fit what he was talking about conceptually, rather than chronologically. This is how we might understand this.

Without getting to stuck in the weeds of detail, in the portion of Luke we ended with a couple of weeks ago, Jesus told the *Parable of the Presumptuous Servant* as He was helping His disciples understand that we need to be humble-hearted servants of God who are thankful to the Lord. And that we should not expect God thanks for serving Him when the privilege is ours by His grace to be those forgiven of sin and given the great privilege of being a part of the work of His Kingdom.

We need to be thankful to God, so that is where Luke kind of left off. So here in this text, Luke was reminded of something to capture the spirit of gratitude that ought to fill the hearts and the speech and the worship of those who are given a touch of the healing grace of God through Christ.

I want for us to take a very, very close look at what happened here. I don’t have an outline for you this morning like I typically do. I just want for us to really think about what we have read and how things went down in this account, all the while praying that the Lord’s Spirit will fill our hearts with gratitude that comes out from us in ways that are effusive.

As Luke opened this story, Jesus was entering into this village and He was encountered by a group of ten men who were experiencing the worst of all possible quarantines in Ancient Israel. It was not a quarantine that would have lasted for a week. I put myself on a self-imposed quarantine because of my sore throat and my cough and my headache last week. I got through it. Behold, here I am again!

However, these leper's quarantine was not one that would have lasted for weeks or months. It was a quarantine that would have lasted the rest of their lives, because it was a necessary separation due to the infectious disease of leprosy.

For each one of those men, leprosy would have started with some discomfort and some sensation around the eyes and around the nose. They would have been wondering what it was they were feeling. Then they would have felt some numbness in their extremities, in their fingers and in their toes.

Soon enough, pink blotches would have appeared all throughout their bodies. They would have different areas of soreness on their skin, so that it would have seemed like scales were forming all over their bodies.

As this progressed, you can just imagine the pit that these men felt in their stomach as they prayed that it would not be the same disease that was consuming the lives of so many others in the land of Israel.

Then off they went, each man in turn, to visit the priest who would carefully examine and confirm what they probably already knew to be true. Leprosy was spreading across their bodies. Each one was contagious. Each one was also ceremonially unclean. Each would need to remove himself from the life of whatever village they were a part of, most likely the one they lived closest to.

Each man would have moved out to the outskirts of the city to a small colony where the disease of leprosy would continue its assault, causing tumors to grow on their faces, causing fingers to shrivel and almost get absorbed by their swollen hands. The toes would have been the same. Eyebrows and eyelashes would fall out. There would be the condition of numbness that spread across the entire body as time progressed.

So there on the outskirts of this unnamed village, this racially mixed small colony formed. We know it was comprised of both Jews and at least one Samaritan, perhaps several more. And that is very interesting that they would be gathered together because there was such racial animosity between these two groups in First Century Palestine.

But there was something about the experience of shared suffering and pain that causes such social boundaries to fall. Suddenly all the preceding animosity did not seem to matter so much as these men made their circle of fellowship and relationship outside of the town.

This colony was far enough away from anyone so that these men would have felt the pain of separation, but it was still close enough that they could communicate with people who would be entering into the town. People could call out to them in raised voices.

So these they would have heard about the buzz that was surrounding this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, there in the region that they were living in. Perhaps somebody would have called out to them, *Look out for Jesus. He is healing people. Sickness is being eradicated. He is traveling with a band of disciples, twelve of them that He is closest to, and with a larger group of seventy.*

Somehow they knew that Jesus was in the region and He had the power of the Kingdom to do miracles, to do things that just don't happen in the course of everyday life. The men were there one day and they saw an entourage approaching the city and hope began to fill their hearts as they saw Jesus and His disciples approaching.

Whether it was just a high level of hope, somehow they had the sense that Jesus could help, so they began calling out to Him to have mercy on them. They called out to Him for anything that He was willing to do, and, obviously, they were hoping for a touch of His healing grace.

In the distance, Jesus stopped. Interestingly, Jesus responded with a single sentence—go show yourselves to the priest. That was it. Jesus would often do things in a way that we do not expect Him to do. Other times, He would come up so very close with His hands touching people, showing so much compassion.

However, on this occasion, Jesus just gave a one sentence reply, an imperative. They called Him Master so Jesus said, *Okay I'm the Master and I will tell you what to do. Go show yourselves to the priest* They knew what this meant.

The priests would have had the role that had an interface with the religious and the medical, at least when it came to conditions like they had. They were the ones who would have diagnosed the conditions, and they would have been the ones to look and see that the condition was healed. These priests were the lepers' entryway back into society, as the priests declared them cleansed.

So they received this instruction from Jesus. They knew the significance of it, and with a step of faith, they began walking on the path and getting closer and closer to the village. Who knows how long it had been since they had walked that way?

As they moved toward the town, they started experiencing something in their bodies. These men began feeling sensation in their fingertips again. Their hands and feet were beginning to reform in such a way that they had full strength and use of them. Their hands and feet looked normal again.

The men saw what was happening. They looked on their arms and the scales and the blotches were fading away. Portions of their skin were becoming smooth again. They looked at their comrades and they saw that the tumors were subsiding from their faces. Eyebrows were appearing again.

Each one knew that if this was happening to the others, it was happening to them too. As they realized what was happening, can you just imagine the sense of ecstatic madness that consumed their little company?

I would imagine they were doing happy dances and were joyfully saying, *Look at you!* Then their joy turned into energy and I would imagine them running like the wind into that village. They knew where the priest lived. They were going to get there and back to their families and back into society again, so off they went, except for one who slammed on the brakes. Except for

just one who stopped dead in his tracks, who turned around and looked back at Jesus, saying, *Praise God. Praise God. Praise God!*

Then as we see here in this text, that was not enough for him, because his first human contact in who knows how long aside from his company of friends in the leper colony, occurred at the feet of the Messiah. So another transport of time took place there. Jesus was out in the distance. Suddenly this man was down on his face at the feet that would soon take the Roman nails for the forgiveness of our sin.

This man was thanking Jesus repeatedly. The tense of the underlying Greek indicates that it was something that was ongoing. He just got close to the feet of Jesus and kept saying thank you, thank you, thank you.

This man did not feel the same need as the other lepers at that moment to do what it took to get to the priest's house, possibly even stampeding the others like it was Black Friday to get his ticket back into society.

You know how it is. Tell me you don't know how it is. I know how it is. You want to get on the tram at Disneyland and there are tons of people there and you are like: don't you take cuts. I have been here the whole time. I'm getting on! Black Friday when people know there is something they want to get a good deal on, people will trample others to get there first. Now the text does not say that happened. That is just me wondering.

This man said, *No, no, no. I am not in a rush to get to the priest. First, I am going back to the One upon whom is the undeniable anointing of Almighty God; this One who has given me my life back; this One who has cleansed me; this One who has made me whole. I'm going to His feet and I'm going to give thanks where thanks is due.*

What a beautiful picture. Behold the worship of a person who is filled with the knowledge the grace and the goodness of Jesus Christ. This type of action ought not be abnormal among the body of Christ. We are to be thankful people with eyes to see all that we have in Jesus.

It is a beautiful picture that is set before us and Jesus made a point of making sure we see it in contrast to the other nine who just left. I picture them like the Road Runner with the cloud and plume of dust as he speeds way into the horizon.

Jesus paused the scene and drew out the beauty of what this man had done. He exposed everything that was happening with a series of three questions. He asked:

**1, Were there not ten cleansed?**

No, Jesus, Your math was right. There ten of them!

**2. Where are the other nine?**

Rushing off to the priest to get their ticket back into society.

**3. Was no one found to return and give thanks except the unexpected one, the Samaritan?**

No, the other ones just dashed off.

Jesus did not ask these questions because He was lacking information. He asked these questions to help us see what is so often the natural human condition which fails to give thanks to God, and the beauty of somebody who has come under the redeeming touch of Jesus Christ, which ought to be profuse in their gratitude toward God.

I look at this portion of Scripture with these ten lepers that are healed and how many of them came back. I say this very cautiously. You can't read too much into it, but I wonder if there is something proportional about that.

As God looks across the face of the globe, how many people truly give thanks to Him for what they have? When was the last time you stopped and thanked God for the things in your life, and, above all, for the mercy that you have received in the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ?

In the book of Romans, Paul the Apostle gave the most detailed explication of what the central message is, and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That book is focused on this theme. Paul began half way through Chapter 1 and continued about half way through Chapter 3, by giving us an understanding of the reality of the fallen human condition of sin; how each and every one of us are all messed up on the inside, which gives ways to all kinds of crazy speech, behaviors, and actions on the outside.

If you think you are righteous, you are not! If you understand that you are a sinner in need of grace, you are in the right place. Self-righteousness ought not to occur among the family of believers. We are righteous solely by the imputed gift of righteousness. We get covered in the righteousness of Jesus.

In Romans Chapter 1 through 3, as Paul laid out the human condition and how we are fallen in sin, he begins by explaining how God has made Himself known through what He has created—the earth, the universe, the glory of everything that is here in this created realm points to the Mastermind behind it all.

We not only see His divine attributes and His eternal power, but going deeper into His divine attributes, we see how good He is, how stunning He is. This is a world fallen in sin, but, brothers and sisters, there are some really, really neat and cool things that happen in this world.

Everyone who just takes a look around at the universe we live in will have an inner sense that there is a God. Paul even said in that text that they are without excuse, because the knowledge of the Lord is everywhere.

Describing the root of sin, it says this in Romans 1:21

**<sup>21</sup>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.**

There you have the first quality of a heart that gets increasingly dim and darkened and loses the awareness of the fact that there is a God and that He is good. It is the failure to honor Him and give Him thanks for the good things that fills this earth.

That is the general human condition as laid out in Scripture. Christians are going to be very different when filled with the Holy Spirit. When their eyes are on the goodness of the Lord that flows to us through Jesus, they are going to be different.

Something that is different about that leper, and something that I love, is that he cried out to the Lord in thanks with the same volume that he had pleaded with the Lord for healing. That is just so neat to me! He was calling for help. Yes, we do that, right? We cry out with fervency for help, but this leper also lifted up his voice in praise and thanked the Lord, which is an awesome thing.

Christians are going to be people who give thanks to the Lord. The will of God for you, body of Christ, is recorded in I Thessalonians 5:16-18

**<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

Colossians 2:6-7

**<sup>6</sup>Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.**

The Christian who is in tune with the Lord are going to be abounding with thanksgiving. We have this gadget in our living room called an Essential Oil Diffuser. You pour a little bit of water in it, then you put different oils in it. You push the button on, then here comes this plume of vapor that is so fragrant, and it fills the living room.

Gratitude should emit forth from a follower of Jesus Christ. If we are having our hearts and minds renewed and as we think about the Lord, as we are taking in His Word and reflecting on it, and as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, it all comes out. We are thankful, thankful people.

We need to be thankful people, because this is a good testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. People who have gratitude are so replenishing to be around. Are they not? We need to be those who are thankful, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Two weeks ago, I opened my sermon talking about a woman and her concern about mushrooms. I wonder how many of you remember that. I worked in a pizza place as my first job as a sixteen or seventeen-year old young man.

There was a lady who would call in all the time to order pizza. She would say, *No mushrooms on my pizza. There cannot even be a speck of mushroom on my pizza, for I am deathly allergic to mushrooms.*

This woman, she was serious about no mushrooms. Do you want to know the irony of that situation? Do you know what staff started calling her, me included? Guess who called? The *Mushroom Lady* called! Do you see the irony? She became known for the thing that she could not have.

Oh, and there is a fine line for us to walk as followers of Jesus Christ, because there is a sense in which the church is to have a prophetic voice when it comes to sin—the ills of the human condition. Sin is bad. It damages lives. It leads to separation from God. It incurs judgement.

Yes, we must preach against sin! But do we get so focused on those things that we are not talking about the glory of Jesus and His love and His grace and His goodness and the power of His Spirit and all the good things that He has given to us?

We want to be known for what we are for, and that is the glory of the Messiah. So we must pray that the Spirit would fill us with a spirit of gratitude for the many gifts of God's common grace, and for the good things that fill our lives, but above all, for the cleansing, redeeming work of Jesus upon sinners like us.

I finish with this: There are so many parallels between the disease of leprosy and the condition of sin that is described for us in the pages of Scripture. Students of Scripture have long been able to discern how leprosy is a picture and a symbol of the disease of the human heart and soul that affects the body as well.

Like all diseases, leprosy starts internally. Then it begins to show itself on the exterior with different symptoms. Likewise, sin is first an inward condition where our desires are all tweaked and rearranged so that we want to use our speech, our bodies, and all the different capacities we have in ways that are harmful, in many cases in ways that are not as the Living God intended it. It starts internally.

In the condition of leprosy, the sensation of physical pain is lost so that there is the condition of numbness; that loss of feelings in the hands and the feet that would make it so that lepers were prone to do damage to themselves without knowing it, because they could not feel it.

Likewise with sin. The more it is practiced and carried out in behavior, the more calloused a person becomes as the conscious becomes seared. People will lie. People will steal. People will abuse. They will curse. They will do so much more with no pang of conscious or remorse at all. We see this all over, do we not?

Leprosy rendered a person unclean and it led to separation as they were removed from society so that the infection would not spread. In the case of sin, it leads to separation as well. It affects relationships here on earth, but, above all, it leads to separation from God. It leads to spiritual

death. The Living God whose eyes are too holy to look upon sin without judging it, He must separate Himself in all of His pristine glory. Sin leads to separation.

In addition to that, at least at the time of Christ, there was no human cure for leprosy. Likewise, here is no human cure for the condition of sin. But there is a divine cure. There is a cure for the sin that exists in us and manifests itself in so many different ways.

There is a cure, and Jesus brought the cure into this world. He came to shed His blood for our sin. He bore our sins in His body on the tree. Being the pure, holy, spotless Lamb of God who never committed sin, somehow He took our sin and He paid the price them.

Going into another aspect of salvation which is justification, God is a Judge and sin angers Him. Sin angers us too. Abuses anger us too. As we need to repeat often, as we think about what the Gospel is, yes, sin stirs righteous indignation. We just need really extreme examples of it to get riled up.

God is pure and holy, and all sin incurs His righteous indignation. On the cross Jesus paid the price for our sin. He paid the price in the courtroom of God so that we could be forgiven, so that we could be released, so that we could be set free, because the price was paid in that we come to Him with humble repentant hearts, saying, *Lord, I'm a sinner and I am in need and I need Your grace to forgive me and I need for Your work to cleanse me from the inside out.*

Forgiveness is given to such humble sinners, so that we read in I John 1:8 and 9

**<sup>8</sup>If we say we say we have not sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

This is the living hope. This is the cleansing that Jesus came to give us. Sin is still at work in this world. The affects of it are everywhere, so that our bodies get sick and they die. But Jesus was risen on the third day, and He gave the promise that all those who have faith in Him, when their body dies, their soul springs into Paradise.

Some day He is going to return to this earth, and we are going to be resurrected like Christ. Our eternal life is a tangible life in which we can dance, sing, hug, slap high fives, and give fist pumps. Then all disease is going to be a thing of the past, and I'm thankful for that and I pray that we will all have gratitude that comes from the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Let's close in a word of prayer.