

Tonight we look to Jesus as we find him in Luke chapter 17. Let us pray. “Lord God, please make all of us more sensitive to express our gratitude to you. Help us to never grow weary in giving thanks, especially as you have made us well by faith. Help us all to be grateful, especially for Christ Jesus and his grace that saves us through faith. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Leprosy is an ugly disease. It attacks the nerve endings rendering them useless. You cannot feel the pain of heat, therefore you can put your hand in the fire and though your hand is severely burned, you feel nothing. The disease eats away at the skin and is highly contagious. As the leprosy eats away at you literally, you lose the use of your hands and other body parts. Fingers can literally fall off and the physical deformities can be not easy to look at. Paralysis and blindness may occur. It is an absolute horrible disease.

The physical symptoms are not the only issue. Lepers were social outcasts and could not be with their family members, friends, or enter an area of worship. You had to stay away from everyone except other lepers. If a leper was walking down the road, within so many feet of other people they would have to cry out according to the law, “Unclean, Unclean, Unclean,” and people would steer clear of these unclean people who nobody wanted to be around.

When the group of 10 saw Jesus from a distance they disobeyed the law and cried out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

When you study the life of Christ, it was so often the worst of sinners and the most unclean that were so freely drawn to him. The righteous people, the religious leaders were the ones who rejected Jesus the most. It is often the lowly who can spot hypocrisy a mile away. There was something incredibly authentic about Jesus.

Jesus heard their plea for mercy. He looked past their infirmity and saw the condition of their lost souls. Their disease was one thing but far more important, Jesus wanted them to

know exactly who he was so that they might be saved for eternity. The salvation of their souls was by far a higher priority to Jesus than the state of their skin. He did not walk the other way and ignore them; he directly addressed them.

If a leper thought his leprosy had gone away, he was supposed to present himself to a priest who would declare him clean according to Leviticus 14. If the leper was cured, they would joyfully undergo an eight-day ceremony and then be reunited with their family and friends.

Jesus sent the lepers to the priest and they proceeded at a leper's pace. Then as they looked at each other and at themselves, the leprosy was gone, completely gone; a great act of God had occurred.

Only one returned to Jesus in order to worship him and give him thanks.

All of us are here tonight to ask God for mercy. All of us are here tonight to worship God and give him thanks. He has saved us by grace through faith and we come and worship Him every week and thank him. We are not like the nine others who fail to return to Jesus, or are we? God has healed and saved the most important part of us, our souls. Our souls will live forever, and Jesus is worthy of all our praise. That is why we are in this place.

One author writes of the leper who returns to Jesus. To be thankful to God is to have an irresistible emotion of gratitude.

Jesus says to the healed leper, "Were not their 10 cleansed? But the nine, where are they?" Was no one found to return and give praise except this foreigner?" "Rise, go away, your faith has saved you."

Friends, every week God gathers us so we can give thanks and when you are not participating I can hear the voice of Jesus, "Where are they."

This is the point of the passage. Jesus wanted the other nine to be with Jesus too. The best part was not getting rid of the leprosy. Jesus said to the man who returned, "Your faith has saved you." In other words, not only had the man received a physical healing, now too his soul,

and most importantly his soul, had been saved for all eternity. Jesus wants to save the other nine as well, but they did not return to Jesus even after he had done so much for them. Today it is very much the same.

Dr. R. Kent Hughes writes, "We must let Jesus declaration, "Your faith has saved you," to have its deepest meaning. The fatal spiritual leprosy fell from the Samaritan's spirit. He received forgiveness, reconciliation, eternal life, and the removal of all alienation and distance between God and himself in place of his sins and moral sickness. Jesus' words were clear. The Samaritan who returned to praise God and offer thanksgiving to Christ Himself had saving faith. Indeed, his gratitude and praise to God were signs of his saving faith.

One word about physical healing and then a word about a thankful heart.

Please do not think, "If only I had enough faith, God would heal me of my cancer, my diabetes, my arthritis, my poor memory, my bad back, whatever. If you are a Christian, you already have faith. Grace through Faith in Jesus Christ saves you. It is God who decides if there is going to be a supernatural physical healing. And if there is a supernatural healing, it is because God makes the choice to do it for God's purposes. A person who God heals supernaturally does not have more faith than the rest. The other lepers were healed but they did not have faith in Christ or they would have returned. Supernatural healings come as God chooses and not because one has some special faith more than another person. It is all based on God's choice for God's purposes and glory. Supernatural healings are not a sign of faith but a sign of God's power over nature and over our physical bodies.

Then a word about having a thankful heart. I am learning the older we get, the more we have to complain about. We hear or learn of things that deeply bother us and keep us awake at night. Looking at Luke 17 teaches us that God wants us to thank him even for that which bothers us. When we thank the Lord, even for the bad things, somehow our hearts are softened and our eyes are opened to see that this is an opportunity to grow in the faith as we trust the

Lord and thank the Lord even for what frustrates us. God will use this situation for His purposes and promises to bring good out of it. Thanks be to God.

The Samaritan returned to worship God and to give thanks to Jesus. Jesus confirmed this man's faith for Jesus knew what this man's soul needed the most, Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Before I close completely for the evening I have a few more words directly from my heart. What I am most grateful and thankful for this evening is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Peter writes, **1 Peter 3:18(NLT)** ¹⁸Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

The death of Jesus on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, and the fact that Jesus is coming again are the reasons you and I can always be thankful, live in hope and despair not. For on the cross Jesus bore all of your sins, past, present and future. The blood of Jesus has washed, is washing, and will wash away all of your sins. God holds none of your sins against you for Jesus took them all on Himself. "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." God looks at us and sees the blood of Jesus has cleansed us completely. Jesus bore all of your guilt and shame, being condemned in your place, going to hell so you will never be touched by God's wrath or the powers of hell. What meant hell for Jesus means heaven for us. He received the punishment that we deserve, and we get all of the rewards of his sinless life, including heaven.

If any of you are carrying with you a heavy load of guilt and shame, I would love to pray with you at a safe distance and with masks on before you leave. God will not condemn you. Please do not condemn yourself. God won't. Amen and Amen.