

Sermon for Thanksgiving

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Preached on 11-21-2007

Introduction:

Tomorrow marks the day when the people of our nation will take time to count their blessings. It is called Thanksgiving Day for that very reason. People will be giving thanks for the turkey and the stuffing and grandma's apple pie. They will give thanks for family and friends; for good health and good weather. By early afternoon, maybe we'll be thankful that the Packers didn't lose to the Lions. After all, isn't that what Thanksgiving is all about? And yet, I wonder how many people will be struggling to feel thankful. People who have lost their job or have been forced to relocate their family. People who have loved ones in the military and haven't seen for months or even years. People with failing health and are enduring the isolation of a nursing home. Maybe people like these are thinking, "What do I have to be thankful for?" Or maybe you've caught yourself asking that very question recently? Maybe you're struggling to be thankful right now? Oh, you'll do the turkey thing. You'll try and stay awake for the game afterwards. You'll even get up early to fight the crowds on Friday morning. But still, you wonder if there's all that much to be thankful for.

My friends, if our hearts are not overflowing with thankfulness this time of year, could it be that we have lost sight of who it is that we are thankful to, and exactly what it is that we are the most thankful for? Even though there are going to be atheists (or unbelievers) celebrating Thanksgiving tomorrow, the fact is that there is no one who is in a better position to be truly thankful than you and me. I say that because we can direct our thanks to more than some generic god out there somewhere. No, we can get much more specific than that. We know the very source of every, single one of our blessings. That is why we...

Theme: Give Thanks to Jesus!

Part I: For His Mercy (vv. 11-14)

Part II: For Our Cleansing (vv. 15-19)

Part I: For His Mercy (vv. 11-14)

Jesus was on His way up to Jerusalem. This was His last journey before His suffering and death. There was no hesitation on Jesus' part to go to the cross. Along the way He came to a village somewhere, "**Between Samaria and Galilee**" (v. 11). As He entered this village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. Leprosy, at that time, was considered to be

incurable. It resulted in the formation of lumps, sores, and other deformities on the skin and limbs of a person. People afflicted with this disease were considered unclean. Because of the contagious nature of it, they were forced to live outside the city limits, in lonely, isolated leper colonies – cut off from everyone they had known and loved.

Is it any wonder why, when Jesus passed by on His way up to Jerusalem, ten lepers cried out, **“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (v. 13)?** That’s all they could do! They couldn’t heal themselves. All they could do was throw themselves on God’s mercy. And that’s exactly what Jesus had on them. Jesus did not ignore them. He didn’t say, “Get out of here! Leave Me alone! You’re disgusting!” Instead, Jesus listened to their plea for help. More than that! His heart went out to them. He had mercy on all ten men.

Application:

Do you see any parallels between what leprosy did to those ten men and what sin does to you and me? Sin is very similar to leprosy. It too is a terrible disease. It begins in the soul, eating away our bodies from the inside out. It eventually takes away life itself. Every one of us inherited this deadly and contagious disease from our parents. It forces us to keep our distance from God. We are not allowed to live in His holy city or even approach His presence. Rather, we must announce our disease from afar: **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death” (Romans 7:24)?** We are no different from those ten lepers. By our impure thoughts, hurtful words, and self-centered actions, we prove again and again that we are unclean. All we can do is throw ourselves on God’s mercy.

BUT then who steps into the picture? As in the case of the ten lepers, Jesus does! Being thoroughly infected with sin, we also realize that we can do nothing to heal ourselves. So what did Jesus do? He took our infirmities (or sins) upon Himself. Scripture says that, **“Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him” (Isaiah 53:5).** Jesus didn’t have to leave His heavenly home to become man, but He did for us. Jesus didn’t have to put up with betrayal by friends and countrymen; disrespect from kings and armies; or death on a cross, but He did for us. Jesus didn’t have to leave behind His Word or His Spirit, but He did for us. Jesus was more than willing to extend His mercy to each one of us.

Transition:

That is why we *Give Thanks to Jesus!* In addition to thanking Him for His mercy, we also thank Him...

Part II: For Our Cleansing (vv. 15-19)

Although Old Testament Law demanded that lepers raise their voices to announce their disease, no one demanded that they announce the cure. But that's exactly what one of those ten lepers did! After Jesus spoke the Word and the lepers went on their way, all ten men were cured. All ten must have realized they were cleansed. Their skin would have certainly looked different. Perhaps they would have felt different as well. This miraculous healing must have stopped them dead in their tracks. They must have stood there, gawking over their smooth, clean skin; looking one another over in amazement. Certainly they all rejoiced over their cleansing. But only one, "**A Samaritan**" (v. 16), returned to *Give Thanks to Jesus!*

This lone, now cleansed leper couldn't get back to Jesus fast enough. Luke tells us, "**When he saw he was cleansed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw Himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him**" (vv. 15-16). Wow! This guy was excited! He was on fire for Jesus! He couldn't shout his praises loud enough or long enough! When he finally reached Jesus, he fell on his face and kept on thanking Him. Considering what Jesus had done, nothing was more important than thanking and praising Him in worship. I imagine he eventually made it to the priests. He surely went home and told his family and friends what had happened. What News he had to share! He more than likely told everyone he ever met for the rest of his life what Jesus had done: How He had cleansed him from his incurable disease!

Application:

When this lone, now cleansed leper returned to thank Jesus, Jesus first asked, "**Were not all ten cured? Where are the other nine**" (v. 17)? Apparently the other nine lepers also trusted that Jesus could heal them. Maybe they heard about what He had done to help others? Maybe they saw some of His miracles from a distance. Whatever it was, they had nothing to lose. So they raised their voices for mercy. Once cleansed, however, they forgot all about Jesus. They took their good health and ran. You know, I wonder if there are times when we do the same thing. We're quick to go to God when we're down and out or when we want something from Him. But what happens as soon as our lives take a turn

for the better? Suddenly we're not praying as often or as hard as we were before. We no longer find the time to read the Bible. Our church attendants can even drop off a little.

But not today! Not this Thanksgiving! Today we are here to do what those nine cleansed lepers failed to do. We're here to offer Jesus our heartfelt thanks and praise. But why do we do this? Is it purely by force of habit or merely because it's a tradition in our house not to celebrate Thanksgiving without going to church first? No! We are here because we trust that Jesus has cleansed us from a dreaded, incurable disease as well. He has taken our sins away. That gives us the confidence to go and show ourselves to the heavenly Father. As we stand before Him, He will carefully inspect us. He will go over every inch of our bodies. But He won't find a shred of sin on them. Because it all fell onto Jesus! Make no mistake about it! We ARE cleansed in God's sight!

Conclusion:

As surely as Jesus was delighted to have that one, cleansed leper come back to thank Him, so also He is delighted to see us here tonight! Our coming back to His house in the middle of the week tells Jesus that we really are thankful for everything He has done for us. And yet, this kind of thankfulness applies to more than just one day out of the year. It applies to every day of our lives.

Perhaps you have heard the saying, "The Christian life is not about thanksgiving. It's about thanks-living!" In other words, being a Christian means putting our thanks into action through: Having a positive attitude, giving generously to Gospel Ministry, forgiving those who hurt us, encouraging and supporting those in need, and so many other things. We do these things because we recognize that we were once poor, miserable lepers. All we had to look forward to was death and eternal separation from God. BUT then Jesus (1) had mercy on us and (2) cleansed us from our deadly disease. That is why we *Give Thanks to Jesus!* Amen!