

*The Thankful Leper*  
Luke 17:11-19

I started my preparation for a today's Thanksgiving Sermon a couple of weeks ago. In looking for sermon ideas, I read a sermon by Ray Pritchard written in 2007 titled, "How God Revealed the Ingratitude of My Own Heart." He wrote this sermon about one year after leaving the comfort and security of pastoring Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park.

It was only after he had gone one year without a regular source of income that Ray realized how unthankful he had been. He writes, *"During all those years when I received a regular paycheck as a pastor, I never once stopped to give thanks to God for his provision. In particular during the years in Oak Park when the church took such good care of us, I was quick to cash those checks but did not say "Thank You" to the Lord. Never one time can I remember being grateful to God for his provision for our needs."* Ray Pritchard, "How God Revealed the Ingratitude of My Own Heart," November, 2007, [www.keepbelieving.org](http://www.keepbelieving.org).

Ray is exactly right. We usually do not appreciate all of the things that God has done for us until they are either taken away from us or until we suffer in some other way. Did you thank God this morning for your electricity? Your hot water for a shower? Your breakfast? The car that safely and warmly transported you to church this morning? Probably not. But how would you feel if you lived in north Jersey and just got your power back three weeks after the hurricane. Would you thank God for electricity then?

The common failure of being ungrateful was further pointed out to me last Sunday. We visited my family on Long Island. Thousands were still without power and there was evident damage everywhere from hurricane Sandy. My sister and her husband had their power restored 2 days earlier. He shared our thanksgiving devotional and gave testimony that he was doing OK during the first few days without power. HE stayed home while my sister spent the nights with their daughter and husband who did have power. But after about six nights his patience started to wear out. The house was down to 40 degrees at night, and he was complaining to the Lord about the horrible situation. But in the middle of his complaints, God revealed his ungratefulness. He gave testimony how lying in bed he started to thank God for a warm blanket, a soft pillow, running water, and a beautiful house that God provided. He tearfully recognized that he had been unthankful and he also thanked God for turning off the power so that he could learn to be more thankful.

This lesson of thankfulness is taught to us by the Savior in the healing of the ten lepers in **Luke 17:11-19** *"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 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!" When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. 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?"*

*Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well.""*

The setting for this miracle takes place in the final weeks of Christ's life. At this point in his ministry, he is spending his time in obscure places, fully aware of the nearness of his suffering and death. He is sharing more openly with the disciples concerning his death, and his face is resolutely set toward Jerusalem. In the following days Jesus would travel to Jericho, then Bethany and eventually into Jerusalem on his triumphant entry. This theme "On his way to Jerusalem" is mentioned two other times in Luke's Gospel. It is Luke's way of reminding us that Jesus was intent to do the Father's will and suffer in our place.

During these final weeks, everything that Jesus did takes on great significance. The healing of the ten lepers teaches us an important lesson about thankfulness and about our surrender to God. Follow this theme with me as we look at the four main part to this brief story.

The first part is that we must **Give Thanks Because Our NEED is GREAT. 17:11-13**

The location of this miracle is important. It takes place on the border of Samaria and Galilee. As Jesus has demonstrated before, his love extends beyond the Jews. He is the Savior of the world, even the Samaritans who were hated by the Jews. Not only was at least one of these lepers a Samaritan, the disease was the most feared disease of the day. The best equivalent that we have today is for someone to be diagnosed with cancer. In Jesus' time, Leprosy was the most feared disease for several key reasons. The location of Samaria, the fact that a Samaritan was healed, and the disease itself all point to the desperate need that Jesus faces when he heals these men.

In this day, Lepers were "UNCLEAN." In Leviticus 13:38-46 we read instructions concerning this diseases. Being diagnosed with leprosy meant that they had to separate from Jewish society and withdraw into a colony of other lepers.

- (1) Lepers lost contact with their families
- (2) Lepers lost their jobs
- (3) Lepers had no hope
- (4) Lepers could not kiss their children
- (5) Lepers could not enjoy family celebrations
- (6) Outcasts
- (7) Alone
- (8) Impoverished

MEDICALLY, we suspect that the leprosy mentioned in the Bible would be called Hansen's Disease today, named after the Norwegian doctor who in 1873 discovered the bacterium that causes the disease. Several types of skin disease in the Bible were categorized treated as Leprosy, including what we now call Hansen's Disease. This particular disease had the following results:

- (1) First, a patch of skin is discolored. It might occur on the brow, nose, ear, cheek or chin.
- (2) Second, the patch turns white or pink and begins to spread rapidly in all directions.
- (3) Third, the disease spreads to various internal organs. The eyebrows may disappear and spongy tumors appear on the body.

- (4) Fourth, tissue begins to disintegrate causing the hands and feet to become deformed.
- (5) Fifth, the nerve endings of the body of the are destroyed. This is the most critical and dangerous stage of leprosy because it means that the afflicted person loses the ability to feel pain. Thus a rat might chew off a finger at night and the person would never feel it. Or they might touch a flame and feel no pain. (Ray Pritchard, "Where Are the Nine?" [www.keepbelieving.org](http://www.keepbelieving.org), April 2007)

Because of their desperate need, these lepers cry out for MERCY. The NIV uses the word "have pity," but I like the translation "have mercy" better. The Greek word is ἐλεέω (el-i-eh-oh). It is the same word used in **Luke 16:24** *"And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'* This word reflects the desperate situation of the lepers. They truly had no hope.

SPIRITUALLY - in the Bible, leprosy represents our SINFUL CONDITION.

There is No cure. Like leprosy, sin spreads slowly and takes over the entire body. It kills what it touches. Like leprosy, sin robs us of the pleasures God intends for us to have. Sin separates us from others. One of the most devastating results for a Jew was that leprosy prevented them from offering sacrifice in the Temple. Leprosy separated them ceremonially from worshiping God. In a similar way, sin completely separates us from God. We are all lepers! We are all in desperate need for Christ's mercy.

The LEPERS were all in the same condition - The fact that they were Jew or Samaritan did not matter. In this story, it doesn't matter if the lepers are Jew or Samaritan. Leprosy reduces everyone to the same status.

It is **reminder that we are all in need of God's Mercy**

As we continue to develop the message of this text, the second part of the story teaches us to **Give Thanks Because GOD'S MERCY is GREATER than OUR NEED.** 17:14

Jesus sends the lepers away. "Go and show yourself to the priests." I wonder how they felt? There is an indication that they demonstrated at least some measure of faith because they did what Jesus told them to do. I can imagine that they would have been eager to go and see a priest once again. They had done this many times before, every time they thought there might be some improvement in their condition, only to be disappointed once again. So why not one more time?

But this time it would be different. As they went, they noticed that Jesus indeed did heal them! The Rabbinic writings included many cures for various diseases, but there was NO CURE for leprosy. The rabbi's said that "curing leprosy was like raising the dead." What Jesus did was truly remarkable.

These lepers experienced GOD'S GRACE. In telling them to show themselves to the priests, Jesus fulfills the Mosaic Law. A priest had to declare that you were healed

Everyone here today has experienced GOD'S GRACE

our health  
God's daily Provision  
Medical care  
Beauty of Creation

Maybe you have not been healed of a life threatening diseases, but you have been given LIFE to enjoy!

Therefore, we should focus on the third part of the story.

**Give Thanks To Whom it is Due. 17:15-16**

Ten lepers left celebrating their deliverance from this disease, but one returns to thank God. This is the point of the entire story. Only one of the lepers glorified God for the blessing that was done. This is where I see many of us today. We like the good things that we get in this world, but we do not associate them with the gracious hand of God. We think that we deserve them, or that we have earned them. We forget that we are poor lepers, desperate and without hope. And we go off on our merry way enjoying the things that God gives us but never pausing to worship him as the Source of these good things.

There is a danger of a thankless heart. **Romans 1:21** *"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."*

This is the condition of those who do not know God! When we are ungrateful, or worse yet, when we complain and grumble, we reflect the heart of an unregenerate person. We are no better than the nine who left without thanking Jesus.

There is an important point to make about this miracle, and its meaning to us. R. C. Sproule addresses this in his book "About Following Christ." He writes, "*Jesus' encounter with the ten lepers illustrates the importance of **thanksgiving**. Countless sermons have been preached about the healing of the ten lepers, focusing attention on the theme of gratitude. The thrust of many of these sermons has been that Jesus healed ten lepers, but that only one of them was grateful. The only polite response to such preaching is to call it what it is—nonsense. It is inconceivable that a leper enduring the abject misery he faced daily in the ancient world would not be grateful for receiving instant healing from the dreadful disease. Had he been one of the lepers, even Adolph Hitler would have been grateful. The issue in the story is not one of gratitude, but of thanksgiving. It is one thing to feel grateful; it is another thing to express it. Lepers were cut off from family and friends. Instant cleansing meant release from exile. We can imagine them deliriously happy, rushing home to embrace their wives and children, to announce their healing. Who would not be grateful? But only one of them postponed his return home and took time to give thanks.*"

I think that Sproule's words are profound, and remind us that we should do more than simply enjoy the things of this world. The key is that we recognize and acknowledge God as the giver of these good things and worship him.

Finally, the fourth part of this miracle teaches us to

**Give Thanks When Others Ignore God's Grace. 17:17-19**

The NINE went on their way.

They weren't ungrateful, they were simply PRE-OCCUPIED with their enjoyment and their plans to go and be with their families once again.

A sermon by Robert Massey points out what might have been going through the minds of the nine unthankful lepers: "

- i. One waited to see if the cure was real.
- ii. One waited to see if it would last.
- iii. One said he would see Jesus later.
- iv. One decided that he had never had leprosy.
- v. One said he would have gotten well anyway.
- vi. One gave the glory to the priests.
- vii. One said, "O, well, Jesus didn't really do anything."
- viii. One said, "Any rabbi could have done it."
- ix. One said, "I was already much improved."

Robert Massey, *"Where Were the Other Nine?"*

There are many Sources of Ingratitude:

Wealth and success.

- (1) **Deuteronomy 8:12–14** *"Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, " "and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, " "then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."*
- (2) **Hosea 4:7** *"The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful."*
- (3) **Psalms 106:21** *"They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt,"*

Forgetfulness. **Jeremiah 2:11–13** *"Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. " "Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD. " "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."*

Self-sufficiency. **King Uzziah 2 Chronicles 26:15–16** *"In Jerusalem he made machines designed by skillful men for use on the towers and on the corner defenses to shoot arrows and hurl large stones. His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful. " "But after Uzziah became powerful, **his pride led to his downfall.** He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense."*

Pride. **Deuteronomy 8:11–14** *"Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. " "Otherwise,*

*when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, "and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, "then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."*

There are also things that will REVEAL our Ingratitude:

Trials

Loss

Confrontation

Complaining. In the sermon mentioned earlier by Ray Pritchard, he talks about our ingratitude. *"If it is manna, we wish we had quail. If it is cereal, we complain because we want eggs. If our black suit is not ready, we complain because we have to wear brown. If we have \$500, we complain because we do not have \$1000. If we have \$1000, we grumble that it is not \$5000. If we do not have cancer, we complain about our arthritis. If we have a car, we wish we had another one. We dream of a better job because we could be doing so much better than we are now."* *"When we are not thankful for what we have received, we open the door to every other sin imaginable."* Ray Pritchard, "How God Revealed the Ingratitude of My Own Heart," (11/07)

*Matthew Henry was an early American preacher and most pastors have a copy of his commentary on the Bible. Once, while traveling to preach, Matthew Henry was robbed. Now most people wouldn't think that would be a circumstance in which you could give thanks, but he did. He wrote: "I am thankful that during these years I have never been robbed before. Also, even though they took my money, they did not take my life. Although they took all I had, it was not much. Finally, I am grateful that it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."*

David Dykes, "Lesson from a Leper"

Do not be afraid of a Frowning Providence. God may be teaching you to be thankful!

No one enjoyed his family as much as the Leper that night

No one enjoyed worshipping at the Temple as the leper that night

Like the Thankful Leper, let's remember how much God has blessed us and be thankful for all of these blessings.