

“Where Were the Other Nine?”

The Gratitude Campaign – part #1

Luke 17:11-19

Welcome

Prayer

Should it be surprising when someone tells us, “Thank you”? Probably not. Still, there are times in my life when I have been thanked and it really left an impression. When I lived in Indian River, I introduced myself to the principal and band director before school even started, and said, “If you need anything, please call me.” I volunteered at the school, leading Cub Scouts, working with the marching band, offering grief counseling after a teacher died unexpectedly, and even substitute teaching (although I did receive a little bit for that.) Now, I was only there for one year, and I didn’t really feel like I had done anything spectacular, but one night, the principal invited me to the senior awards presentation, where they gave me this award. (Show them the shoe trophy.) This trophy almost brought tears to my eyes. I wasn’t looking for anything in return, but when I received this, it was very clear that they had appreciated what I had done.

I keep a file of thank you notes in my office that I have collected over the years. It’s not to inflate my ego – it is simply a reminder of what God has done in my life because I have made myself available to others. Each one of those cards was a little surprise to me, and I was blessed by them all.

Thank you cards always make us feel good. When someone says, “Thank you,” and sincerely means it, that’s a great feeling for both the giver and receiver. We can never say thank you enough, especially to God. That’s why today we are

starting the “Gratitude Campaign.” We are going to look at what God has done in our lives and in our church, and ask how we are responding to say “Thank you” with our words and actions. I believe we are created to give thanks, and flexing our gratitude muscles keeps them from getting atrophied.

Praising God and thanking Jesus go hand-in-hand, as evidenced in our scripture today. Jesus, of course, was known for performing many miracles. In Luke 17, Jesus was completing his last missionary journey before heading to Jerusalem, and he made a pit stop on the border between Galilee and Samaria. While he was entering the town, ten men approached him at a distance. The Bible tells us that they had leprosy, which could be any number of skin diseases or rashes, including what is known today as Hansen’s disease.

Now, there were some bad things that could happen to you in 1st century Palestine, but leprosy was among the worst. The disease marked you as an outcast. Literally, you had to tear your clothes and live in caves outside the towns. Whenever someone came near, you had to yell, “Unclean!” so that they didn’t get too close. (Leviticus 13:45)

Somehow these men had heard rumors of Jesus. They knew this great healer was coming to their area, so they took the risk of approaching him, albeit at a respectful distance, and crying out, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” They probably looked very pitiful with their rags and sores. It must have been humiliating to call out to a stranger, “Lord, have mercy on me!” Still, Jesus looked right at them and said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” For a leper to be officially healed, they had to be physically inspected by the priest and proclaim clean again. Presumably, these men were physically healed as soon as they turned to go to the temple, but they needed that final priestly blessing.

It would be incredible to be healed of leprosy. That would mean you could re-enter society, see your family and loved ones again, and have a normal life. Jesus gave these men an incredible gift. However, only one, in his excitement, remembered to return to thank Jesus. Even though it appears that all ten had the faith to believe and be healed, only one had faith that “blossomed into joyful praise of God and gratitude to Jesus.”¹

Jesus was surprised. In fact, he seemed a bit indignant. “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?” he asks. (Luke 17:17) The one who was cleaned literally threw himself down in the dirt at Jesus’ feet. Why? After all, the leper could have gone anywhere to praise God. All ten were all on their way to the temple. What better place to praise and thank God? The gospel writer is telling us an important truth here: praising God and thanking Jesus are intimately connected. You can’t do one without the other. This man, a Samaritan, not a Jew, was the one whose faith was placed on a pedestal. He is our example to follow.

Are we grateful for what Jesus has done? Then we should show it. I could tell you about the ways that I praise God and thank Jesus for this church, but I would rather have someone from the congregation share their testimony. That is why I have invited Pam and Dave Ciganick to share today about what God has done for their family through this church as they express their gratitude toward Jesus.

Testimony – Dave Ciganick

Thank you, Dave and Pam.

¹ Tannehill, Robert C. Tannehill, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Luke*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996.

I have one thought for you to consider today, as we undertake this Gratitude Campaign in our church. Is Jesus surprised by your gratitude, or by the lack thereof? I am not saying that by our giving we can impress Jesus. Remember, God’s love in Christ is unconditional. Jesus never leaves us nor forsakes us. However, Jesus wants what is best for us and our hearts. The Bible speaks clearly on generosity and gratitude:

Psalm 50:23 (ESV) - “The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) – “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Jesus said whoever is forgiven much should love much. (Luke 7:47) He knows that a pure, grateful heart causes us to see God. (Matthew 5:8) A Gratitude Campaign is not focused on the amount we give to God and the church; it is focused on the state of our hearts. If we have abundant joy (John 10:10), then our gratitude overflows (Psalm 23:5)

The other nine lepers also experienced the grace of God. They were miraculously healed. But in their excitement, or maybe just because they were careless, they never came back to Jesus to say thank you. Think about it. What causes a man whose skin has just been completely healed to throw himself down in the dust? Nothing but pure, exhilarating gratitude for new life. That is the same gratitude we can display when we encounter the amazing power of God that is offered to us through the grace of Jesus Christ.

We all must practice our gratitude to God in tangible ways. Don’t be one of the other nine who never came back to thank Jesus. The goal of our church is not

to have 10% of us praising God, it is to have 100% praising, worshipping, giving, and thanking God.

Do whatever it takes. Keep a gratitude journal by your bed. Each day, write five ways that God has blessed you. Count your blessings before each meal. Talk with your family about the importance of saying thank you to others and to God. When you do this, you will cultivate a heart of gratitude, a pure heart that will see God and respond in faith and thanksgiving.

This week you will receive a letter explaining the Gratitude Campaign. On October 7th, World Communion Sunday, we will all be given an opportunity to present a Gratitude Card with our estimates of giving for the following year. If you choose, you can keep your card anonymous, or you can write your name on it so that the finance secretaries will know who it's from. What I ask all of you is that you prayerfully consider how you are expressing your gratitude to God for this congregation. I believe that our response will be joyful and generous, because that is the proper response for all the Christ has done for us.

Let's pray.

Memory Verse: Psalm 50:23 (ESV)

“The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;
to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”

Reflection Questions:

1. Describe a time when have you shown your appreciation for something someone else did for you.

2. Can you remember a time you did something for someone else and they did not thank you? How did you feel?
3. Why do you think Jesus pointed out that the leper who returned was a Samaritan and not a Jew? What does this indicate about the kind of faith and practice Jesus looks for?
4. Do you regularly show your thanks to God? Why or why not? How?
5. How is giving to the church connected to our gratitude for what Christ has done for us? How does it teach others to be grateful?