

THANKSGIVING 2019

Two men were walking through a field one day when they came face to face with an angry bull. The bull charged them and they raced towards the nearest fence. It soon became apparent that they were not going to make it so one of the men yelled to his friend "We are in trouble. You better start praying!" The friend yelled back "I can't pray." Terrified, the men yelled back "why can't you pray?" The friend said "I have never prayed out loud before, I do not know what to say!" Seeing that the bull was almost on them the man yelled back "we are about to die! Just pray whatever comes to you." The man thought for a moment. He could only remember one prayer that his father used to pray every time they sat down for dinner. As the bull reached them he shouted out "O Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful."

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. We are celebrating Gods' rich provision in our lives over the past year. We are also celebrating the grand opening of our new building. It has been a long journey and I am so glad we are finally nearing the end. We have so much individually and corporately as a church to be thankful for today.

Luke 17:11-19 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Have you ever wondered why so many Christians, who have been healed of a disease far worse than leprosy, who have experienced the blessings and forgiveness of Jesus do not seem to show gratitude in their lives? Why we forget sometimes to say thank you.

We are much like the little boy who was given an orange by a man. The boy's mother asked, "What do you say to the nice man?" The little boy thought and handed the orange back and said, "Peel it."

Our biggest problem in the church today is this vast majority of Sunday morning Christians who claim to have known the Master's cure but do not return to thank Him by presence, prayer, testimony and support of His church. In fact, the whole Christian life is one big "Thank You," the living expression of our gratitude to God for His goodness. But we take Him for granted and what we take for granted we never take seriously. -- Vance Havner

This scripture reminds us of three things this morning;

1. Our POSITION

Luke 17:11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance

These men were standing at a distance to Jesus because they knew their position. The disease of leprosy was a terrible thing. Because you felt no pain, parts of your body would be damaged and die.

However, it was not only the physical illness that was the worst part. Lepers were separated. They were shut out and cast off. They were isolated. To approach healthy people could mean that you would be stoned to death.

They were shut out from their FAMILY. No one knows how long it had been since they had felt the touch of their wife or the kiss of their children. Remember the movie Ben Hur when he learns that his mother and sister have become lepers. He wants to go to them but they do not want him to because then he too might contract the disease.

They were shut out from their FRIENDS. When a person in ancient time found out they had leprosy, it was basically a death sentence. They would have to immediately leave everything they knew and go into isolation. It was like a prison. They were not free to come and go as they chose. They were imprisoned by their condition.

They were also shut out from their FAITH. For Jews, the temple was the place where you met with God. It was the place where you dealt with your sins. As lepers they were shut out from the temple, separated from God forever. They were declared unclean.

These lepers understood their position, which is why they stood far off from Jesus. Do you understand yours? The bible says that we all like sheep have gone astray. We have all blown it. Our sins have separated us from God and made us all outcasts. Prisoners to sin and death. Our sins have made us unclean. We all deserve death for what we have done.

Remember the story in Luke 7 when the woman who had lived a sinful life went into the Pharisee's home to anoint the feet of Jesus with perfume?

Luke 7:44-47 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Those whom are forgiven much, love much. Those who are forgiven little love little. We have all been forgiven so much, but when we loose sight of this we downplay our sin and minimize our condition. We need to be reminded again of our great need.

Back in 1988, a Polish railway worker named Jan Grzebski was hit by a train. He lived ... but only barely. For the next 19 years he was in a coma. He awoke in 2007 to a whole new world. Nineteen years earlier, Poland was a communist state. Back then, meat was rationed and there were huge lines at nearly every gas station. there was only tea and vinegar in the shops. But 19 years later, he awoke to a free nation where he said there were "people on the streets with cell phones and there are so many goods in the shops it makes my head spin." But something puzzled him. "What amazes me is all these people who walk around with their mobile phones and yet they never stop moaning." These people had freedom, and food and wealth greater than Poland had had for decades ... and yet Grzebski woke from his coma to find that ALL they seemed to want to do was grumble! They had forgotten how bad things used to be, and because of that they took for granted how good things had become.

When we forget what we have been saved from, we forget to be thankful. If you don't get into the habit of thanking God for what you DO have, you'll soon become ungrateful because what you DON'T have. Remember what you have been saved from. Remember the high price that Jesus paid for your salvation. This communion table that is set before us this morning serves as a reminder of the price God paid so that we could live. Remember your position.

2. Our PRAYER

Luke 17:13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

These lepers knew their condition. They knew that there was no cure, yet still there was hope. They had heard about Jesus, so when they saw Him passing by they cried out to Him for help. They knew their need and when they had the chance to do something about it, they did.

People do not cry out to Jesus for help unless they first understand their need. The reason so often that people do not cry out to Jesus for help is that they do not see that there is anything wrong with them. The devil is working overtime in our world today to try to remove the concept of sin. We no longer talk about sin anymore, we just talk about lifestyle choices and personal challenges.

If a person does not know they are sick, they will never seek healing. If a person does not know they are lost, they will never try to be found. These lepers knew they needed help and they asked for it. They cried out for it. It was the desire of their hearts, their prayer. They cried out for help, and Jesus answered them. But then notice here what He says;

Luke 17:14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

Prayer without obedience is useless. Jesus tells them to go to the priest. On the surface, this must have been a very scary thing to do. Going to a priest while still a leper could have meant being stoned to death. The priests had no power to cure but they did have the authority to declare someone who was cured of leprosy to be clean and then to issue the certificate of cleanliness so that all would be sure of their healing. Notice that they were not healed immediately. They were only healed as they went. As they obeyed the command of the Lord by faith they were healed.

Remember a few months ago in our series Daring Faith where I said that part of living a life of faith is not simply praying for things but then stepping out in faith and acting as though you already had it.

When you thank God after you get the answer to your prayer, that's called gratitude. When you thank God before you get the answer to your prayer, that's called faith. These men took Jesus at His word and went, and as they went they were healed.

There was a father and mother in a little church whose son died during the Second World War. One day they came to the pastor and told him they wanted to give a special offering as a memory to their son who had died in battle. The pastor said, "That's a wonderful gesture on your part." He asked if it was ok to tell the congregation and they said that it was. So the next Sunday he told the congregation of the gift given in memory of the dead son.

On the way home from church, another couple were driving down the highway when the father said to his wife, "Why don't we give a gift because of our son?" And his wife said, "But our son didn't die in

the war. He came home. Our son is still alive!" Her husband replied, "That's exactly my point! That's all the more reason we ought to give in thanks to God."

3. Our PRAISE

Luke 17:15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him -- and he was a Samaritan.

Here is the key to gratitude. All were in the same awful position. All prayed and all were healed. Yet only one of the ten returned to offer thanksgiving. Where are the other nine?

I have no doubt that after they were declared clean by the priest they made their way home to family and friends. To hug and kiss the wife and the children. To visit with Mom and Dad. To talk with friends. Their minds were occupied on all that the blessing brought to their lives. But one. One loved his wife and children just as much as the others. One wanted to hug and kiss his wife and children just as much as the others. One wanted to spend time with his friends just as much as the others. One wanted to enjoy the blessing just as much as the others. But one had his priorities in order. One did not get so wrapped up in the blessing that he forgot the blesser. One put family, friends and fellowship on hold so that he could worship the one that made his being with his family and friends possible.

Notice that with a loud voice he glorified God. With the same voice he cried out for mercy, he now glorified God. Many times we cry loud for help and low with praise. But with the same zeal we sought help we should also praise. And he fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan. He was not worthy to receive God's help. But by grace he was healed and he comes to worship the one who unconditionally healed him. And he got more than the others did. They received physical healing from a distance. But this one not only received physical healing but he got close to God and worshipped him as Lord as well. Notice Jesus' penetrating words;

Luke 17:17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

Where are the other 9? We are not born grateful creatures. Think about babies, they only think of themselves. One minute cooing, the next crying; one minute silent, the next screaming. One minute smelling sweet, the next...well, you know! Babies are not born saying, "Thanks". It is not even the first word they learn. In order for children to learn to return thanks, they must be taught. They must be reminded to be thankful.

I read a news story once of a woman who was getting ready to jump off a 44 story building in New York City. Witnesses said that she did not look like the type of person who would do such a thing. She was very distinguished and well dressed. All the attempts made by the police to get the woman off the ledge had failed. One of the officers asked if he could call his pastor in to see if he could help. When the pastor arrived, he asked permission to go to the ledge and talk to the woman.

As the pastor neared the edge the woman screamed, "Don't come any closer or I'll jump!" The pastor took a step back and then said, "I am sorry that you believe no one loves you." This got the woman's attention and it got the attention of the police. That was something that you don't usually say to a person who is threatening suicide. The woman took a step towards the pastor and said, "My grandchildren love me and so does my children. My whole family loves me! I have 8 wonderful grandchildren and they love me."

The pastor took a step towards the woman and said, "Well then, you must be very poor, maybe that is why you want to take your own life." The woman who was a little overweight said, "Do I look like I go without any meals? We live in a very nice apartment. I'm not poor."

The pastor took another step closer to her and was now 3 feet from her when he asked, "Then why do you want to kill yourself? I don't understand." The woman thought for a moment and then said, "You know, I don't really remember." The story ends with the pastor and the woman walking towards the elevator as she shows him pictures of her grandchildren. Eventually this woman becomes a volunteer on the city's suicide hotline, helping others choose life. What did the pastor do to help this woman? He helped her get her eyes off herself and onto the many ways that God had blessed her. She learned a valuable lesson that day. She learned that thankful people are happy people.

If you don't learn anything else today, I hope you learn this valuable lesson. Thankful people are happy people. We have so much to be thankful for today.

In light of all that we have been given, have you done your best to say thankyou to God for all these blessings. Have you done your best for Jesus?

During the night of September 8, 1860, the steamship *Lady Elgin* collided with the schooner *Augusta* in the waters of Lake Michigan. The *Lady Elgin* was carrying more than 300 passengers and crew on a round-trip sightseeing tour from Milwaukee to Chicago. Not knowing how badly the ship was damaged, the captain tried to make it back to port. As dawn approached the ship broke apart and sank. Most of the passengers and crew died. Only a handful survived hanging on to pieces of floating wreckage. For hours they held on in the cold water. Nearing land, some tried to make it to shore only to be pulled back into the breakers by a fierce undertow.

People on the shore saw what was happening and wanted to help, but non dared going in because of the strong undertow. None except a student named Edward W. Spencer from Northwestern University in Evanston Illinois. An experienced swimmer, he had a rope tied to his body, and time after time swam through the waves to grab exhausted passengers. People on the other end of the rope then pulled him and the victim to shore. Many victims held onto floating debris for long hours in the cold water. Time and time again he went out. In all, seventeen people were saved. Finally, having reached the limits of his strength, his body covered with cuts and bruises, Spencer passed out. He woke up in the hospital where his brother, William, waited on him. Edward's first words were, "Will, did I do my full duty -- did I do my best?"

Although he tried to resume his studies, the physical and emotional toll on Spencer had been severe. Newspapers around the nation praised his deeds but he was never completely comfortable with the attention. The faces and cries of the victims he had not been able to save forever haunted him. Spencer never completed his education. He spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. And when visited in later years he said with tears, "Not one of those rescued ever came back and even said thank you." After his death, his brother described Edward's private torment: "His face would turn ashen pale, and he would fasten his great hungry eyes on me and say, 'Tell me the truth. Did I fail to do my best?'"

In 1924 Edwin Young heard Spencer's story and published a song that draws a spiritual lesson from the incident. His song raises the penetrating question, *Have I Done My Best for Jesus?*

I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
Who died upon the cruel tree?
To think of His great sacrifice at Calv'ry!
I know my Lord expects the best from me.

I wonder, have I cared enough for others,
Or have I let them die alone?
I might have helped a wand'rer to the Saviour,
The seed of precious Life I might have sown.

The refrain heaps question upon question:

How many are the lost that I have lifted?
How many are the chained I've helped to free?
I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
When He has done so much for me?