

## JESUS BLESSES A THANKFUL MAN

Luke 17:11-19

Key Verse: 17:16

“He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.”

In the last passage we learned the seriousness of sin and of causing others to sin. Sin leads men to eternal condemnation in hell. So we must not take sin lightly. We must watch ourselves. We must rebuke our brothers who sin and forgive them when they repent. The battle against sin is a fierce one. But Jesus promised us that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed we can experience the power of God and have spiritual victory. The Bible says that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day. His blood has the power to forgive and cleanse our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness. His resurrection opens the way to eternal life in the kingdom of God. When we have faith in Jesus, God gives us victory in this life and eternal life in the world to come. This is all by the grace of God. So we must have the attitude of unworthy servants and do the work of God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength. After finishing our mission we must say, “We are unworthy servants. We have only done our duty.” May God help us to learn the attitude of an unworthy servant.

In today’s passage Jesus heals ten men with leprosy. Jesus thus reveals his divine compassion and almighty power once again. But the story does not end with the healing. One of the ten comes back to thank Jesus. Jesus gave him a special blessing. May God help us to see Jesus the Messiah today. May God help us to give thanks to him so that we may also receive a special blessing.

First, Jesus carries the cross of world salvation (11).

Look at verse 11. “Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.” Here St. Luke reminds us that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus knew what was waiting for him there. It was the pain and shame of the cross. Nobody else understood what was happening. But Jesus knew all too well. Luke 9:51 says, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” Jesus had made a firm decision of faith to obey God’s will and die on the cross in Jerusalem. Jesus’ countenance was so intense that James and John became very nervous and tried to call fire down from heaven on those who rejected him. However, Jesus, even though he was bearing the burden of the cross in his heart, was not angry or edgy. He prayerfully did what God wanted him to do. Jesus revealed God’s universal love for all mankind. Jesus trained his disciples as servants of God. Still, Jerusalem was always on Jesus’ mind. In Luke 13:33 Jesus said, “In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.” There was no deviation in Jesus. He was ready to obey the will of God unto death—death on the cross.

When we see how Jesus took his cross and obeyed the will of God, it inspires us to carry out God’s mission also. Sometimes we wonder how we can pass calculus, let alone feed five sheep. Sometimes we wonder how we can be faithful to orchestra practice, let alone become a missionary to another country. Sometimes we wonder how we can keep going to work every day, let alone pioneer a new chapter in the future. But when we look at Jesus we find the answer. Jesus carried his cross by faith. Jesus never wavered in his obedience to God’s will. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we too can carry the cross of mission (Heb 12:2,3).

Luke says that Jesus was on the border between Samaria and Galilee. As we know, Galileans, who were Jews, did not get along very well with Samaritans. Jews held deeply rooted prejudices against the Samaritans because they were not pure Jews. But it was more than a racial matter. It had to do with the spiritual corruption of the Samaritans who did not worship God properly. Because of this, the Jews thought that God would not accept the Samaritans. But Luke persistently reveals that Jesus’ love extended to the Samaritans too (9:55; 10:25-37). There is a great spiritual meaning in Jesus’ traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee. It anticipates the reconciliation Jesus would bring between Jews and Samaritans, and between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus would make the two one. Ephesians 2:14 says, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility....”

Our world is in turmoil these days. In the Middle East, Jews and Arabs are constantly fighting and shedding blood. At this moment, the U.S. military is hovering over Iraq and North Korea. Disgruntled terrorists are plotting in Europe, America and other places. Some people wonder where we can find peace. But in Jesus there is peace. The

barriers of hostility that divide people come from sin. Christ died for our sins. His blood has the power to destroy the barriers that divide people. There can be true peace in Jesus Christ. That is why the angel said his coming is glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests (2:14). The gospel of Jesus brings true peace. Therefore, it is most urgent that we pray for the raising and sending of missionaries to all nations, especially Muslim countries and North Korea. We must not only pray, but obey God's calling person by person.

Second, Jesus' mercy upon ten men with leprosy (12-14).

Look at verses 12-13. "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!'" These ten men with leprosy seem to have formed their own fellowship. They were no longer Jew or Samaritan—they were lepers. They were outcasts. They were miserable in their disease and they had no hope for the future. They had only moments of temporary relief, saying to one another, "I am a pitiful leper. You are also a pitiful leper. Let's be friends based on our common pitiful condition." Then they wanted to hug one another. But at the thought of hugging another leper, they recoiled. They might have divided into two teams to play basketball against each other, five on five. But that could be dangerous, leading to severe lesions or even lost appendages. One day they heard that Jesus was coming to their region. They found hope in Jesus. They must have heard how he had healed other men with leprosy. As Jesus entered their village, they formed a welcoming committee by standing in formation some distance away. They came to Jesus with the utmost sincerity and respect to ask his help.

These men with leprosy called out, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" They were wretched in their leprosy. In their helplessness, they begged Jesus' pity. What did Jesus do? The first part of verse 14 says, "When he saw them...." Jesus saw them. Jesus did not pass them by. Jesus did not ignore their cry for mercy. Jesus stopped and looked at them, letting his eyes settle on them one by one. Each one felt that Jesus was looking at him and was concerned about him. As he saw them, Jesus' heart was moved and he decided to heal them. Jesus never ignores the cry for mercy. Jesus is the God of mercy who is ready to shed his grace on those who come to him. Jesus did so when he was on his way to Jerusalem.

Jesus said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Jesus had already decided to have mercy on them. To Jesus, they were already healed. But Jesus did not take a pose and wave his hand, nor did he say, "Be healed." Instead, he told them to go and show themselves to the priests. According to Jewish law, after examination by the priests, they could obtain a certificate of recovery and enter society as normal men. Jesus told them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Jesus wanted them to obey first and then receive healing. Jesus wanted them to obey his word by faith. These men came to Jesus to be healed of their leprosy. But Jesus wanted to do more than that. Jesus taught them to trust and obey his word. Jesus taught them to have faith in what they did not see. Jesus had hope for these men with leprosy. Of course, Jesus wanted them to be healed, to marry and live a normal life. But more than that, Jesus wanted them to learn obedient faith and grow spiritually as children of God. Jesus may have wanted to send them as missionaries in the future. In our time, many people come to Jesus for help to solve a personal or family problem. It is easy to see such people as mere opportunists. But Jesus saw these men with leprosy with hope that they would be raised as spiritual children of God.

Verse 14b says, "And as they went, they were cleansed." The men with leprosy may have been surprised at Jesus' words. It was not what they expected. But they did not hesitate. They turned to go to the priests. As they did so, something happened. The rotting flesh and open sores were suddenly healed and their flesh became clean and healthy. The terrible disease of leprosy was gone. They were okay. It was a miracle. Ten useless men with leprosy were cured and became normal men when they obeyed Jesus' word. Jesus is the Messiah who heals incurable diseases by his power. Jesus heals any kind of disease when we trust and obey.

Third, Jesus blesses one who gave thanks (15-19).

Look at verse 15. "One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice." We can imagine how happy this man must have been to see that he had been healed. He was happier than a person who lost his pot belly in an instant. He was happier than a poor student who suddenly got all A's on his report card. He was happier than a homely woman who suddenly receives a marriage proposal from the most handsome young man. It was the mercy of God on a wretched man with leprosy. He saw God in Jesus. He saw the love of God in Jesus. He was overwhelmed by the fact that God loved him and that Jesus had healed him personally when he obeyed his

word. So he came back, praising God in a loud voice. As he had cried for pity with a loud voice, now he also praised God with a loud voice.

Look at verse 16. “He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.” Throwing himself at Jesus’ feet was an act of surrender. He knew he was nothing but a man with leprosy. He could not do anything to help himself. But when he came to Jesus by faith, Jesus healed him out of his divine mercy. The man had a new life by the grace of Jesus. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet to express his submission to Jesus. He gave his new life to Jesus.

The man also thanked Jesus. His thanksgiving was not superficial. His heart was overflowing with gratitude to Jesus. He was like the woman whose sins were forgiven who poured out her perfume and tears on Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair (7:38). Luke pays special attention to the fact that this man was a Samaritan. In fact, he was a normal man who thanked God for his grace.

Look at verses 17-18. 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?” Jesus knew that all ten were cleansed. But nine of them did not come back. Nine of them did not praise God for what he had done. It seems that to them, getting the benefit was everything. They were not interested in knowing Jesus better. They did not think it necessary to praise and thank God. Jesus’ question implies that it was their spiritual duty to return and give praise to God. It was what a normal man who bears God’s image would do. Their failure to do so was a sin of omission. It was a sin of ingratitude. They abused their privilege as chosen people and took Jesus’ grace for granted. It was a big mistake. According to Romans 1:21, not thanking God is the starting point of a horrid degeneration into sin.

To Jesus, it was a sorrowful moment when he found that his own people, the Jews, were ungrateful and ungodly. At the same time, Jesus must have been comforted by the one Samaritan who did return and thank him with great affection and wholehearted devotion. Jesus poured out another blessing on this man. Look at verse 19. “Then he said to him, ‘Rise and go; your faith has made you well.’” Jesus accepted his submission. Jesus accepted the dedication of his new life to Christ. Jesus acknowledged his faith. And Jesus sent this man out to live happily by the grace of God. No doubt, this man was embarking on a life of spiritual growth in the image of God. Jesus expected to see this man again in the kingdom of God. Though he was a Samaritan leper, he had the image of the elders who surround the throne of God who fall at his feet, laying their crowns before him (Rev 4:10,11).

In this passage we learn a very important lesson. We must thank God for his grace in our lives. By God’s grace, our terrible sins have been forgiven. We must thank God for this. In addition, there are so many good things God does for us each day. We must see what God has done and thank God always. St. Paul said, “...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1Th 5:18). Those who thank God can grow in faith to inherit the kingdom of God. But those who do not thank God do not grow. There are so many people who use their loud voice to cry out to God when they are in trouble. But when God answers their prayer and rescues them, they do not even whisper “Thank you.” Then they do not grow and they wonder why they are not growing. Sometimes they even blame God. But those who learn to thank God can grow continuously and be useful servants of God.

Jesus himself showed us the best example of giving thanks to God. It was the night of the Last Supper. In just a few hours Jesus would be arrested, tried and crucified. His disciples were not really mature. One of them would betray him. Another would deny knowing him. They would all run away from the cross. But Jesus was thankful to God. When he shared the bread with them, he gave thanks. When he shared the cup with them, he gave thanks. Then Jesus went to the cross and offered his body and blood for the sin of the world. God blessed his offering and made Jesus the source of eternal salvation for all who believe in him.

Grandfather Noah had the difficult task of building an ark to save his family from the flood judgment. It took a long time and much hard labor. When the flood subsided, the earth was barren. It was time to start all over again from the beginning. But Noah was thankful to God for sparing his life and his family. He was thankful to God for giving mankind a new beginning. The first thing he did was build an altar and offer a sacrifice to God. God smelled the pleasing aroma and gave him a wonderful promise that he would not destroy the earth again by a flood.

St. Paul was on an evangelistic journey with Silas. When they preached the gospel in Philippi, there was a work of God. At the same time there was a work of Satan. Paul and Silas were arrested and put in jail. They could have cried

over their wounds and circumstances. They could have said to God, “Why did you treat us like this after all we did for you?” But they did not. They began to sing hymns to God with a loud voice. They thanked God from the jail. They praised God from the jail. Then God poured out a blessing on them. God opened the prison and gave them a chance to escape. But they did not. They stayed for the sake of the jailer who was about to commit suicide. It led to the conversion of this one man and his family. It produced a marvelous spiritual blessing on the gospel ministry in Philippi. Philippi became the support base for St. Paul’s missionary journeys.

Early American forefathers had a difficult time to pioneer this land. The Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony suffered a 50% fatality rate their first winter in America. But they held on to Matthew 6:33. God helped them overcome the situation with faith. The next fall, after harvesting some crops, they held a thanksgiving celebration to God. It became the seed of the Thanksgiving holiday we know today. God blessed their thanksgiving and poured out his grace on America.

John Newton was a sailor, the son of a sea captain. As a teenager, he read a worldly philosopher’s book and began to live according to his sinful nature. On one voyage his ship was caught by a terrible storm. It seemed that they would all perish at sea. John Newton began to remember Bible verses that his grandmother shared with him. He realized that if he died in the storm he would go to hell. So he got down on his knees and cried out for God’s mercy. Gradually the sea calmed down and the boat landed. It was God’s answer to prayer. At that point, many people who receive grace slip away, forgetting what God did for them. But after going ashore, John Newton went straight to the nearest church. There he poured out his heart in thanksgiving to God and gave his life to Christ. Then God blessed him to be a pastor for the church of God. He lived a life of gratitude to God. Out of his gratitude, he wrote many hymns of praise to God. One of them is “Amazing Grace.”

Simply speaking, this passage teaches us that when we thank God we can grow spiritually and receive abundant blessing from Christ. But when we don’t thank God we lose our connection with Christ. May God help each of us offer sincere thanksgiving to God for what he has done so that we may grow continually in faith and grace.