

THANKSGIVING MESSAGE 2020

AND HE WAS A SAMARITAN

Luke 17:11-19

Key Verse 17:16

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

Everyone knows the Apostle Luke is a physician. I once read a novel by one of my favorite historical fiction biographical authors, of a Catholic background— since all her heroes were saints of sorts. The novel I read was about Saint Luke, and TAYLOR CALDWELL, the author that is, she named the novel “DEAR AND GLORIOUS PHYSICIAN”. What a novel name for a novel! “Taylor Caldwell” had an uncanny way of describing the life and works of her saints, whether it was that of Paul she was unfolding or of Luke or whoever else she was writing about, she put you right there with him through the journey of his life until you could feel the full impact of what her title “DEAR AND GLORIOUS PHYSICIAN” meant; until you could fully experience the man Lucanus [as she called him by his Greek name], the young struggling physician, what we know of his possible upbringing from historical records, through his first baby steps on his journeys with Paul, unto his maturity upon his meeting with the Apostles and the Lord’s mother. Luke was indeed a dear and glorious physician, beloved by all. He was the kind of physician who deeply understood the suffering of his patients, and whose compassion for them came to eventually rival that of the Lord and Master he came to believe in and to deeply love. He served those he cared for as if every one of them was the suffering Christ himself who needed the tender hand of the dearly beloved Physician. As I read that book in my early days, I came to love Luke, the dear and glorious Physician and to understand why he was so special among the Apostles. It doesn’t take much to see why Luke put certain stories together to compile his gospel narrative. There’s a distinctive flavor to his gospel that makes it different— special— unique.

Look at this story for example. Of all the thousand stories Luke heard about Christ, why tell this one? What makes this story so special to him? What makes it so unique? Well, to begin with, there’s a foreigner in it; and the foreigner is uniquely thankful and consequently he’s also greatly blessed. Don’t forget that Luke himself was also a foreigner. And you can bet that at the heart of his heart, he too was one of the most thankful people who ever lived. And that fountain of gratitude that welled up from his heart was the flame that ignited every story; And that very

gratitude was the flame that burned in his heart as he wrote the gospel that has brought life to countless people over the ages; And it was that very Thankfulness that put this foreigner Luke right there alongside the other Gospel writers who walked side by side with the Lord. Take a look at the passage before the one we're looking at today, namely verses 7-10. What the Lord is saying here is that it's not customary for the Master to thank his servants for doing what they're supposed to do. On the contrary! Servants who know their unworthiness before their Master would be willing and glad to fulfill their duties to their Master with a humble and thankful heart! Luke really understood these things, as a foreigner himself who was shown mercy by the Master and now sheltered in the Master's house. And so he wrote about them, as they were relayed to him.

Luke wrote quite a bit about thankfulness, you see! His perspective on thankfulness is compelling and resonates with godly wisdom. In today's passage, it's worth listening to one of his most gripping stories about the value of a thankful soul as it stands before the Master of all souls. The question is what's so important about thankfulness? Well, to begin with the Bible talks a lot about thankfulness. For example, when God created you and me, he purposed us to be thankful (Romans 1:21). In other words, it was one of the reasons we were created. You and I were created to express unending thanksgiving to the Lord. It's written right here in our spiritual DNA. It's like we get sick if we don't do it! And it's probably why so many people are so sick. And no one can get better until the "thanksgiving gene" receives the proper medical attention and gets treated! Isn't that an important enough reason to learn the value of a thankful heart? Only then can we be truly healthy and as the Lord puts it "well" and "whole".

So, how can we have a strong foundation in thankfulness? Where else can one learn it if not from the Lord himself! So look at the passage again. Luke 17:11-19.

Look at verses 11-13a: "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...." There's a long history of hostility and deep rooted hatred between Jews and Samaritans that we won't go into here. But let me just say that Jews and Samaritans didn't mix. So what we have here is Jesus traveling the border between the two provinces— that is— the "HOT ZONE" or "NO-MAN'S-LAND". Ordinarily, it's a desolate place, abandoned, except for those who are the pariahs of both societies, that is the people who are left to wander. Look who among them also wandered in that desolate place!

Apparently, lepers! Lepers were also cast out there to face their horrible end far away from everything they were once familiar with in life or held dear. And they were brought together here in this wasteland by leprosy. But before we talk about them, there's something even more intriguing.

We also see our Lord Jesus there in that wasteland! But is it so strange to find him there? Perhaps not! Actually, it's the Lord's tendency to be found in such desolate places, where no other Man would voluntarily want to be. When every Jew would rather circle around Samaria, taking the very long road to get to the province of Galilee, we see our Lord Jesus crossing right through the province to stop at a well. (John 4) He's there to break every cultural, social and gender barrier of that generation in order to bring one lost woman back to the worship of God. When everyone goes to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Holidays, our Lord isn't celebrating with everyone. (John 5) Instead we find him at the pool of Bethesda where no one wants to be on their holiday. We see him walking amidst the helpless and the needy, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. He's there to help an invalid man get on his feet. Where do we see our Lord this time? Now we see him in these wastelands where hopelessness and death reign. What's he doing there? Maybe he's there to answer the faint prayers of the hope of ten forgotten lepers, abandoned and doomed to their grim destiny. Since, where there's even the faintest prayer of hope in Christ, there's life ready to burst forth even from the ashes of death.

Not many people give much thought to prayer. Not many consider how powerful prayer can be— even that prayer whispered even in the weakest faith— or that prayer murmured even with the slightest hope! But I want you to look again at verses 12-13a. “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....” They had to have heard that Jesus was in the badlands. The news of his arrival had to have made its way even to the smelly dingy caves where they were all cloistered together day in and day out. News of Jesus and of the immensity of his compassionate heart penetrated every corner of the land. The word of God he spoke thundered in people's ears; news of his miracles, especially his loving healing hand extended without bias to both Jew and Gentile alike. Now, *THAT NEWS* must have travelled before Jesus like wildfire! The few who dared carry food for these miserable lepers, must have also carried the GOOD NEWS of Jesus! And as the Bible says: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14) And since “Faith comes from hearing the message” (Romans 10:17), perhaps the faintest hope began to grow in one, then two of their hearts, until the flame of faith became the cry of their souls that the Master

would pass this way. And on the day they heard that he was about to cross over, maybe— just maybe— they spent the night out on the road for fear they would miss him. The next day when their eyes saw his entourage approaching, you could feel their excitement; they were ready to run towards him. But they couldn't! The Law demanded them to keep social distancing— on the penalty of being stoned to death!

They could have been standing far off from the main road, a huddled mass of hideous creatures, covered with rags. But ten voices carry far, especially when their demands were desperate. Listen to them: "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" Maybe again and again! (13) They called him "Master" meaning "CHIEF COMMANDER", the same title Apostle Peter used to obey Jesus' command to go into deep water after a failed night at fishing. (Luke 5:5) These lepers called him "Master" because they believed him to be the "CHIEF COMMANDER" of all things whom the Living God had entrusted with all things. They believed he is the "COMMANDER IN CHIEF" who has the authority over all things; he commands disease, he even commands death! They had believed this about him the day they began to hear stories about his life and works. And they had been waiting for him. And now their wait was over. All they had to do now was to pray, and what a prayer! "Have pity on us!" It's all they wanted— the Lord's compassion and his merciful healing! Who knows who they were before they became lepers! Were some good people; Bad people; Did some deserve this horrible end; this leprous misery; Did they not; Did they deserve better! Who knows! No one knows if they would have deigned to even look at Jesus had not leprosy disfigured them and made them suffer beyond human bearing. But today, as leprosy ravaged their bodies and ate away at their hearts and souls, there was only one desperate prayer that united them as they stood before the MASTER OF THEIR DESTINY. "Have pity on us!" It was a genuine prayer; and it was heartbreaking, because it was a call for mercy! Surely, Jesus had crossed the hot-zone to tend to the likes of them. So what did Jesus have in mind?

Look at verse 14. "When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.'" And what do they do? Apparently, without question, they turned and went. "And as they went" here's what happened: "They were cleansed"! Isn't that brilliant? There's so much to get into here, but we haven't got the time. However, let's just say that their prayers for mercy were answered. And the Lord wasted no time to honor such obvious and shining faith in him. He did it by sending them at once to the priests to receive certificates of cleansing. Why did they need such certificates? It was to rejoin society as men free of leprosy! Don't you see what's happening here? Look again at verse 14b. "And as they went, they were cleansed". Their HEALING went

side by side with their OBEDIENCE to Jesus' Command. Or, to put it in another way, from the moment Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priests and they turned to go, they never doubted his Word! They never doubted that the "CHIEF COMMANDER" had already done the impossible for them. They didn't doubt that the "Master" had already poured out undeserved mercy on their wretched souls. They never doubted that the Lord had already commanded their cleansing from terminal leprosy. They believed he'd restored their lives. They believed they'd received their lives back from the dead!

[It takes childlike faith to take the Lord at his word without question. It takes humility of heart to take his Word to heart. Years of life's misery had humbled these lepers and stripped them of all false pride. It had left them broken. On the other hand, doubt comes all too easy and all too often to those who are content and proud of heart. Look at our carefree generation! They doubt and question everything— especially the Bible— and they think it's a virtue to do so. And you wonder why Jesus says things like: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) And you wonder why there are hardly any miracles done in our times.]

And believe it or not, here's where our story actually really begins— along the road where the ten lepers walked. Put yourself for a moment in their sandals. As you're walking, you begin to visibly notice your friend's healing before you notice your own healing. Then the commotion gets louder because the whole band of lepers are talking at once. Now they're shouting— jumping— pointing at each other's faces and hands and feet. Now they're touching each others skin and crying in disbelief! And the sound of their jubilation can now be heard even as far as the crowd following Jesus. But as I said, this is where the real story in this passage begins. And what happens next is really our own story. It's the story of those of us, although sick beyond curing and unworthy of mercy, we're loved beyond measure; and are healed and restored to health: And although the grace of God falls on us like rain, oftentimes, in our jubilation we tend to forget to give thanks to the Master whence all good things come. Let's see the events that followed the healing of the ten lepers and restore our thankful heart.

Look at verses 15-18. "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?'" Yes! There were ten lepers who were healed. And based on Jesus' words, we see that they weren't all Jews, but that one of them was a

Samaritan. Under normal circumstances, he wouldn't have been accepted in their company. But leprosy had erased all their hostility and prejudice and had forged a brotherhood— a bond of unity among them fusing them into one. However now, something was about to separate them yet again! Look again at what happened. Nine who apparently were Jews, that is, of God's people— didn't even take a moment to come back and say "THANK YOU" to the "Master". Yet, as the "Master" pointed out, only one did— and he wasn't a Jew but a Samaritan— a half-breed— not of God's people. In other words, of the ten only one foreigner KNEW WHAT [someone who's been shown mercy] NEEDS TO DO! Only one stranger to God's people knew the value of what he'd received from the Lord, and the enormous debt an unworthy man owes the "Master" in return! When Jesus singled out this foreigner, it wasn't his ethnicity or race he was trying to draw attention to. Jesus wanted to draw attention to what was in his heart. So what was in his heart?

Well, look at what he did! He may have once been a Samaritan foreigner— not a Jew by birth— not of God's people— a hostile— a despised reject— far from any blessing reserved for God's people. But on this very day, he had a choice to make. In his moment of intense joy, when the other nine continued their journey to the priests, this man made a decision to turn back. Like all the others, he too was eager to get his release papers and go see his loved one. But there seem to be a priority on his heart that surpassed the rest! He needed to worship and pour out his thankful heart at the "Master's" feet. Where were the other nine, Jesus had asked? One could argue that they were still on their way to the priests in obedience to the Lord's command. Yet, while the Lord was glad that this foreigner had returned to offer praise and thanksgiving, we cannot but sense the Lord's dismay that no one else returned to give thanks! So what set this foreigner apart from the others was this: It was the right choice he made with a right heart before God. He made it his heart's priority to honor Jesus. And he honored Jesus by publicly acknowledging Jesus' grace and mercy to him. He knelt down before him and praise God loudly with thanksgiving for all that was done for him, for he knew he was an unworthy man.

But that's not the end of the story. Verse 19 is the icing on the cake. "Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'" What did the Samaritan thank Jesus for? Surely he thanked him for cleansing his leprosy. And we don't need to get into cause of spiritual leprosy which is sin, and Christ Jesus who alone is its remedy. But I do want us to understand why Jesus said to this man whom he's already cured of leprosy, "Rise and go; your faith has made

you well.” What faith was Jesus referring to? And in what other way has it made him well? In the KJV, Jesus’ words to this man are as follows: “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” The word “WHOLE” gives us a general idea of the man’s final condition upon his return. There was a time in his life he knew he was unworthy and deserving of the Lord. But he heard of Lord’s mercy, and so he mustered the faith to beg for the Master’s mercy. When the Lord shed his grace upon him, he never lost sight of who he was. He remained the same undeserving person who always needed the Lord’s mercy. His heart welled up with thanksgiving. His eyes welled up with tears. His soul rejoiced at such unmerited grace. He knew what a debtor he was to the Lord. It takes faith to realize we need God’s mercy and to receive his grace. But it also takes great faith to maintain that grace in our lives from moment to moment and not to lose sight of the debtors we are before the Lord. That makes us healthy and restores a deep sense of thankfulness into our very soul. It was THAT GLORIOUS FAITH that Jesus recognized in him, and commended him for it. And it was that faith for which Jesus told him “It has made you well” or “Whole” body and mind and soul. The other nine may have been delivered from physical leprosy, but as long as they didn’t know how to turn their hearts to the Lord in thanksgiving, their hearts and souls were still far from whole. Let’s learn from the Samaritan to deeply appreciate God’s grace and mercy in our lives and not to take them for granted. Let’s learn to be thankful. Let’s restore our basic thankfulness.