

## Gratitude: An Act of Worship

Luke 17:11-19

*On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. **Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.** And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, **“Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”** Luke 17:11-19 NRSV*

Leprosy was one of the most feared disease. It was a debilitating illness. Recovery from leprosy was not expected. Yet, Jesus healed ten lepers and reminded them of the path they needed to take to be restored to their communities. Nine of them, in their astonishment, failed to return to thank Jesus, but one did return, a Samaritan.

### Significant particularities of the story:

- The lepers knew who Jesus was; they called him by name and gave him the title of Master.
- Their cry for mercy does not necessarily mean that they were pleading for healing. They could have been pleading for alms. If the lepers were pleading for alms and not necessarily for a healing, then the story serves as a reminder that *God “can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”* (Ephesians 3:20).
- No healing command is pronounced by Jesus. There is only one other story with this same characteristic, the healing of a woman with the bleeding problem.

If the ten lepers received healing? Why 9 of them went on their ways? Is it that they were ungrateful? What was it that made the Samaritan go back and “prostrate himself at Jesus’ feet and thank him” (v. 16)?

Let’s take a closer look at the biblical story to find out what made the Samaritan go back and thank Jesus.

#### 1. *Then one of them, when **he saw that he was healed...***

What happened to the rest of the group? Did they notice or not?

There is this constant message in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus came to give sight to the blind.

Ten were made clean. One was healed.

The bodies of the ten lepers were cleansed. But only one received the healing that is all encompassing and for that reason the Samaritan could see beyond the obvious.

2. He **turned back**, *praising God with a loud voice.*

Because he could see beyond the obvious, the Samaritan felt the need to return to express gratitude.

- Story of person in the parking lot looking for a place to park.

We cannot take things for granted; we must turn back and thank God.

At the beginning of the story we hear the lepers calling from a distance with a loud voice on the name of Jesus.

**Grateful people give thanks with the same intensity they cry out for help...**

3. ***He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him...***

Prostrating, bowing down... is an act of worship.

When the Samaritan's eyes were opened, he saw Jesus for who he truly is, as God.

Only God can heal what seems incurable. Only God can restore what is beyond repair. Only God can give meaning during hopelessness and despair. The Samaritan could see this truth and that's why he came back and prostrated before the Lord. The Samaritan leper came back not only to say *thank you*, but also to show his gratitude.

We teach our children good manners and the importance of being grateful. We usually prompt our children to say, "*thank you*," with the words, "*What should you say?*". That's a great thing for us to do. However, I wonder if there is something missing in our efforts. Sometimes, I wonder if we are only teaching people the importance of expressing gratitude verbally and we are forgetting to teach others about the importance of expressing gratitude through actions.

I wish it would become tradition for us to teach our children not only what should they say, but also what should they do as a response for being thankful. *Showing* thanks (gratitude) is equally if not more important than *giving* thanks. Thankfulness expressed through words is measured with our actions. Our verbal gratitude is either ratified or refuted with our deeds.

I think it is imperative for us to talk to people about how we can *show our gratefulness*. It goes beyond *verbally expressing gratitude*. It is about giving thanks with your whole being.

Of course, as people of faith, we should model how this is done. We should act like thankful people every single day of our lives. And by example, we should teach others to do the same. This is how it looks...

- If you are thankful for the opportunity to work/to go to college/to be in ministry, be diligent with your duties.
- If you are thankful for the gift of friendship, nurture your relationships.
- If you have been blessed with the help of a friend or family member, and you are thankful for it, please show gratitude by using that help in ways that will honor and maximize the sacrifice of that person(s). Do not misuse and abuse people's generosity.
- If you are grateful for the gift of life, make sure you do your best to lead a healthy life. Make decisions that are beneficial not only for you but also for your family and the larger community.

Again, give thanks but also *show* thanks. When we combined in perfect harmony our grateful words and actions, our gratitude becomes an act of worship.

4. *Ten were healed, one was made well.*

The Samaritan experienced full healing in addition to physical cure and because he was able to notice that, he could do nothing else but give thanks to Jesus. Spiritual healing compels us to search for and acknowledge the Healer.

Were the other nine who were healed of their leprosy ungrateful? I would say that for some reason they did not fully open to the healing power of God in their lives. And that prevented them from receiving full healing. They were cleansed but they were not fully healed. Their physical condition had changed, but their mental, emotional, and spiritual state was still frail.

Gratitude stems from fully realizing the work of God in our lives. Gratitude is generated as we open to the healing God is working in our lives and let God awake us to a new reality. So, let us show gratitude in word and deeds because that is an act of worship.