

*Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance <sup>13</sup> and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”*

*<sup>14</sup> When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.*

*<sup>15</sup> One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. <sup>16</sup> He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.*

*<sup>17</sup> Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” <sup>19</sup> Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)*

### **Thank God!**

Last week when I was in California, I went to a conference about Bible translation. They had a dinner there celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the commissioning of the NIV translation of the Bible. I was supposed to go to that dinner. But I got confused when I filled out the online forms and I registered for a different banquet. So I went to the person responsible and asked if it would still be possible for me to attend. She was very gracious and she told me to come. Even though I didn’t have a ticket to get in, she made sure that I did. At the end of the dinner, the publishers of the NIV had a gift for all the people who had registered for the dinner. It was a very nice, leather bound, copy of their newest edition of the Bible. It costs fifty dollars in their catalogue. Since I had not registered, I figured I wasn’t going to get one. But that same lady made sure that I did. So the next morning, I went to her and thanked her for doing all that.

Every one of you would do the same, right? It was just the right thing to do. Do we do the same for God? Tomorrow is Thanksgiving Day. It’s a wonderful holiday. But the problem with having an official holiday for thanking God is that it makes it too easy for us to relegate our gratitude to this one day a year. Giving thanks to God needs to be a way of life for us.

#### **I.**

**Thank God! It’s the proper response to his blessings.** Of course, that’s the lesson of the incident in the gospel for this evening. Ten lepers came to meet Jesus. They came hoping he would heal them. This was close to the end of Jesus’ work and by this time he had healed many people, including many people with leprosy. They came because of the terrible effects of this disease. Now the truth is, we don’t know if this was true leprosy or not. Today, that disease is often called Hansen’s disease. It causes the nerve endings in your hands and feet to die so that you can’t feel pain anymore. If you can’t feel pain, you don’t pull hand away from something hot and your skin burns. You don’t feel cuts and bruises. Those unfelt wounds can get infected and rot. But in Jesus’ day, the words that we often translate as “leper” or “leprosy” could also refer to any skin disease that causes damage and can spread. Most of those were incurable in Jesus’ day. That was bad enough. But under the law God gave his people, if someone came down with a disease like that, they had to leave their families and their homes. They were required to keep their distance and to shout out and warn people that they were coming so those people could get away. They couldn’t work. They couldn’t shop. They couldn’t interact with the people they loved.

So when these ten men heard that Jesus was coming, they came to him and asked, **“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”** Everyone knew what they wanted. And Jesus gave it. He said, **“Go, show yourselves to the priests.”** Why did he say that? Again, under the law of Moses, if someone were healed of this kind of disease, the priests had to certify it before they could go home. Everyone understood that he was telling them that they would be healed.

So they went. Now, they weren’t healed when they left. They were healed on the way. So the mere act of going to the priest was an act of faith. They were not nine rank unbelievers and one believer. They were ten believers who took Jesus at his word. But what happened to these ten believers when they discovered that the Son of God had answered their prayer and wiped their disease away? Nine of them continued on their way. Only one came back to thank Jesus and praise God for what had been done for him. And Luke makes it clear that he was a Samaritan. The Jewish people regarded the Samaritans as half-breeds and heretics. But it was the

Samaritan, the half-breed whose theology was not all that it should be, who knew to thank his Savior, while the more pure Jews did not.

Why didn't they come back? Maybe they were afraid that if they didn't keep exactly the letter of what Jesus and Moses had commanded, they would be un-healed. Maybe they were just so excited about going home that they kept going, figuring they'd thank God later. Maybe some of them wanted to, but peer pressure kept them going forward. Maybe they just didn't think of it. There are so many reasons why they might have continued and the Bible doesn't spell out which one is true.

But we can all imagine doing the same, can't we? Why don't we thank God constantly for all the blessings he's given us? Look around you. Look at the family that loves you. Love at the warm church you sitting in and remember the warm house you're going home to. Think about the dinner you're going to share tomorrow and the time off from work. Think of the job and the clothes and all the blessings you enjoy every single day. Then think about every prayer God has answered, prayers to get better when you were sick, prayers to rescue you when your car was sliding on the ice, prayers to take care of your children as they left for school and to bring them home safe. Think about the faith that God has given you, the promise of eternal life in Christ. Think about the comfort when life hurts and the joy in your Savior.

Do we thank God as much as we should? My guess is that we don't. I know I don't. Why not? We're busy. We take things for granted. We go along with the crowd. We plan to do it later. And so on and so on. What did Jesus say when the Samaritan came back? **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”** Was Jesus satisfied with any of the excuses those nine men could've given? No. When God showers his mercy on us, the only proper response is to thank and praise him. And it is simply sin to neglect that duty.

But my friends, the same Christ who healed their bodies, the same Christ who heals our bodies when we're sick, the same Christ who provides all that we need to live and to rejoice, that same Christ has provided forgiveness for us. He came because we sinners are ungrateful by nature. He came because he knew that even we believers would never be capable of the kind of thankfulness that God calls all people to show. So he showed it for us. Every day of his life, he knelt and thanked God for every blessing he had. He even thanked God when life hurt. He did all that so that God would hear you and me thanking him, even when we don't. Then Jesus died and wiped away all the ingratitude of our hearts. He died and paid for every time that we were too busy or too self-centered or too distracted to get on our knees and thank our Savior. He died and he paid for us all. When he rose, God announced to you and to me and to all the world that we are forgiven. We are free. We are his. Like those ten men who took Jesus at his word, we have the promise not just that our illnesses here will be healed, but that we will live with him forever. As we walk toward that eternal life, let us constantly thank our Savior for all that he has given us.

## II.

That thanks is really a matter of faith. Yesterday in catechism class, I asked the kids how we confess our faith. One of them said, “By praying and thanking God.” It takes faith to thank God for what he has given us because we have to understand that God is the true source of all that we have. God makes us well, even when he works through doctors. God provides for us even when he does it through our job. So, my friends, **Thank God! It's the natural response of faith.**

So why didn't those other nine lepers do that? I said before they had at least some faith, because they took Jesus at his word and went to show themselves to the priests. But every believer is mixture of faith and unbelief. The Bible likes to talk about an Old Man and a New Man. The Old Man is the sinner who's been inside us from the moment we were conceived. He doesn't trust in God at all. The New Man is the believer that God gave us at the moment we came to faith. But the Old Man has been trying to strangle that New Man from the moment God laid him in his spiritual cradle. If that New Man isn't fed and nourished with the good news about Jesus, that Old Man will win. Every time we sin, the Old Man wins a little victory and if he can string enough of those little victories together, he can strangle our faith.

Those nine lepers lost the fight against their Old Man that day. And so do we, sometimes. But even if we lost yesterday, even if it has been months since we thought to stop and thank God for all that we have, even if our faith is on the ropes, it doesn't have to die. Jesus is there to give it life. Every time we hear of our Savior, he pumps new life into the New Man – who is now our true self. Our natural reaction is to be thankful to God for all that he has done. Knowing Christ gives us the strength to fight against the ingratitude of that Old Man.

Knowing Christ informs our prayers, so that like these ten men, we bring all our needs to Jesus. He said to the Samaritan, **“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”** What he said in Greek is very interesting. The words that most translations render “has made you well” literally mean “has saved you.” Now, this is the word that a Greek would use if someone were drowning and you pulled them in. You would also use this word if a doctor came and saved the life of a patient, and so, it is legitimate to translate “your faith has made you well.” But it’s also the word that you would use to mean “give someone eternal life.” What Jesus said here was true in at least two senses. His faith had saved him from going to hell. And his faith had rescued him from that horrible disease and all that went with it. He could now go home because he trusted in Jesus and asked him to heal him.

My friends, our faith does the same for us. We come to Jesus in pain and in sorrow and we ask him to have pity on us. He does. Sometimes, he’s just waiting for us to ask before he grants us relief. Even when he determines that the best thing for us is to suffer a little longer, he’s doing that to save us and bring us home to heaven. Our faith in Christ clings to his love, his work, his sacrifice, and he brings us home. Our faith leads us to give him glory. That’s what thanking him does. It points to Christ and what he has done. That’s what we do every time we gather here: we recite what Christ has done for us. We thank him and give him glory because he alone could save us.

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. Make that day about all that God has given you. When you remember your family and your home and your job and your health, remember your faith, too. Because God gave you faith, you know Jesus who watches over every step you take here, who has the power and the love to rescue you from every illness and disaster here, and who promises to work through all things to bring you home. You know Jesus who died and rose so that you will live. Thank him and the Father who sent him and the Spirit who gave you faith in him, tomorrow and every day. Amen.