

“Is Your Thanksgiving Faith-Living?”—Luke 17:15-19

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Is Your Thanksgiving Faith-Living?”, is Luke 17:15-19 → *Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Throughout the history of our nation there have been proclamations by the Continental Congress, governors of states, and presidents of the United States calling everyone across the country to observe a day of national thanksgiving. In fact, from 1863 to the present there has been an unbroken series of presidential proclamations for the observance of a civil holiday called “Thanksgiving Day.”

Interestingly, proclamations of the first 200 years are much different than the proclamations of the past 40 years. For example, the President’s proclamation on November 20, 2015 said, “Thanksgiving offers an opportunity

for us to express our gratitude for the gifts we have and to show our appreciation for all we hold dear.” The focus is on a “spirit of togetherness and thanksgiving . . . whether around dinner tables, in soup kitchens, or at home cheering on our favorite sports teams . . . we are all united in appreciation of the bounty of our Nation.”

He quoted George Washington’s proclamation made on October 3, 1789 saying, “President George Washington proclaimed the first Thanksgiving in our country’s nascence, calling on the citizens of our fledgling democracy to place their faith in ‘the providence of Almighty God,’ and to be thankful for what is bequeathed to us.” In this quote from George Washington is the only mention of God in his proclamation. However, a read of George Washington’s proclamation clearly reveals the focus of our thanksgiving to be “Almighty God” while the focus of the president’s proclamation is a sense of togetherness.

Even the attitude and perspective of this proclamation flows differently. While the President talked about how “the inherent selflessness and common goodness of the American people endures” George Washington saw it as a day to “unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions.” The proclamations went from a spirit of humility and

gratitude in the midst of our shortcomings to being thankful in a spirit of sharing because we're so good. On November 1, 1777 the Continental Congress proclamation even recommended that no work **or recreation** be done "on so solemn an Occasion." Our nation's Thanksgiving Day proclamations reveal that reasons for gratitude on this civil holiday are very relative to the circumstances and mentality of the times.

People may be grateful for many things in their lives. However, the issue is not just being grateful to avoid being an ingrate—**it's giving thanks to the One Who deserves it—Almighty God!** This is revealed in our text by the response of the one leper who returned to thank Jesus for healing him.

Ten lepers came seeking Jesus' help with faith, trusting that He could do something about their situation. Maybe they had heard of Jesus' other healing works as news about Him spread across the land. Maybe they had acquaintances who had experienced the power of Jesus in their lives and told these lepers about it. Maybe they were simply desperate and figured they had nothing to lose. Whatever their reason, these ten lepers came to Jesus with great expectations based on some kind of knowledge of His power.

In one sense, we're not any different. When we approach God in prayer we expect Him to do something about our requests—**that's why we go!** Faith moves us to Jesus because He can do anything for us that He wills to do!

How we respond to God's blessings in our lives reflects our faith-living. Upon their request Jesus told the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests. Actually, this was kind of premature on His part. It was required by Jewish law that a leper who was healed present himself before the priest to verify the healing and present the proper sacrifice for cleansing. The priest would declare him to be publicly "clean" and he could live within the community again. Jesus' words required faith on their part in the midst of their leprosy. Luke 17:14 says: *As they went they were cleansed.*

Then an interesting thing happened. Verses 15-16 of our text tells us that *one of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks.* Only one was grateful?

I would imagine the other nine lepers must have been happy, if not ecstatic and even thankful when they realized they were healed. It causes us to wonder about these guys! Jesus even questioned their response! So, why did this one Samaritan leper thank Jesus while the other nine went on their merry way? It is possible that they reacted to God's gracious providence as many sinners do—go in the deliverance to enjoy their new life and leave Jesus behind.

Perhaps this Samaritan leper had a completely different perspective of

Who Jesus was through what He had done. He put the emphasis in the right place, recognizing Jesus as God in the flesh for only God could do such a miracle. We see this in his worship actions: *He fell on his face at Jesus' feet*, humbled in the presence God Himself. It is quite possible that the other lepers simply saw Jesus for what He did for them and by-passed Who He was—God in the flesh.

Such a confusion is quite common. One of the reasons we fail to be thankful is when we are focused on the gift rather than on the Giver. An example of such an “emphasis shift” is when people share healing experiences and are impressed by the person doing the healing rather than simply praising the LORD Who gives the gift of healing. Anyone can be thankful or grateful. However, the gift should always point us to the Giver—to Jesus.

Paul experienced such a confusion while preaching the Gospel in Lystra. After healing a cripple, the people mistook Paul and Barnabas for gods. Paul pointed them to the LORD by referring to His gifts evidenced in His daily providence in our lives. In Acts 14:17 he said: *God did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”*

Jesus said it this way in Matthew 5:45 → *God makes His sun rise on the*

evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. All people are the beneficiaries of God's gracious providence! Therefore, proper thanksgiving flows from faith-living—recognizing **both** Who the LORD is and what He continually does for us!

This leper recognized both Who Jesus was as well as what He was able to do for Him. He used his new body and voice to return and thankfully worship God as Lord over His life, **embodied in the Person & Work of Jesus**, described in Colossians 1:15-16 as *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created through Him and for Him.* God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, should always receive the glory and thanks!

This leper's faith-living is also expressed by Jesus' words in verse 19 of our text: *your faith has made you well!* The Greek word used here is the word for "saved." Because this leper's faith was directed to Jesus, not only to what Jesus had done for him, he not only received physical healing but spiritual healing as well!

Proper thanksgiving flows from a recognition of imparting grace. Consider this leper's situation. He was a *Samaritan*, a *foreigner* considered undeserving of God's blessings by the Jews. As such he might recognize

more than the other nine that he was totally undeserving of Jesus' *mercy on* him. His thanksgiving was an expression of his faith-living!

Is your thanksgiving, faith-living? Do you recognize thanksgiving as a special part of your daily life and not just a special day of the year? Can you **daily** see the LORD's grace in the midst of His providence?

We too are unworthy of God's gracious work in our lives through Jesus Christ, His Son. This realization is heightened when we look at how often throughout a day we grumble and complain about the slightest, minute inconveniences. In the midst of such a realization we too need to find ourselves at Jesus' feet asking Him to *have mercy on us!* His words of forgiveness and salvation spoken to us over and over, day by day, will produce worship flowing from faith-living with an **immediate** response of thanksgiving and gratitude!

All of these lepers took Jesus at His word and headed for the temple, the place of God's presence and the priestly office. However, one of them expressed faith-living with thanksgiving by recognizing where the presence of God really resides—in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. Our faith-living is directed toward Him **daily** in humble worship filled with thanksgiving! Amen.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;

*for this is the will of God **in Christ Jesus** for you.*

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

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