

This passage deals with gratitude and the lack thereof. The account is only found in the Gospel of Luke. At no time in history have people had so much and been so ungrateful at the same time. It was predicted by the Apostle Paul that in the last days people would be ungrateful (2 Timothy 3:2ⁱ). It seems the more we have, the more we expect to have. The better our lives are, the more we expect them to be even better. Advertising plays a part in this sentiment, but it is mostly due to our greedy hearts. Prosperity is a blessing and a curse. We want our family to prosper financially, but then comes the temptation to live for what is temporary (1 Timothy 5:6ⁱⁱ).

Christians are not immune to this problem. The Scriptures command us "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18ⁱⁱⁱ). It is our fallen nature that is prone to complain rather than praise God in gratitude for whatever He brings. It is the story of the Jews in the wilderness murmuring about one thing after another. If we believe God is good, we should be glad even for difficulties because we know they are allowed by our loving Savior to mature us.

¹¹ *On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.* Luke 17:11 There was a large Gentile city, Bet Shean, just south of Galilee and north of Samaria. It is an amazing archeological site. A major road would have gone by it, and this may have been near where the passage took place. This is one of the few times Jesus is mentioned being in this region. He was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. Luke has been giving us accounts of what took place on those trips to Jerusalem since chapter nine (Luke 9:51^{iv}). It seems he is combining three trips into one, and perhaps that is because all of Jesus' earthly life was a journey to the cross.

Most of the place names where Jesus ministered up until the last few months were in the region Isaiah predicted, the land of Zebulon and Naphtali (Isaiah 9:1^v). The last few months we see Him in Tyre, then up in Caesarea Philippi, and then near the southern tip of the lake feeding the 4000, and now on His way south never to return. It appears to me to be an outreach to the Gentiles in that area.

¹² *And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance* Luke 17:12 By law they were to refrain from entering towns and were supposed to cry "unclean" when they were near other people (Leviticus 13:9-11^{vi}). They would stay in groups of fellow lepers for company and protection. They often resorted to living in caves. The lepers who approached Jesus did so in desperation. Their leprosy must have been obvious. They probably had the appearance of the walking dead. They were near the entrance to the village to plead for food. Perhaps they had heard that Jesus had mercifully healed a leper. We saw that in Luke chapter five (Luke 5:13^{vii}).

¹³ *and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* Luke 17:13 They cried out to Jesus as Master (*epistata*) to have mercy on them. Only Jesus' disciples used that term. Those who were not followers used the term teacher (*didaskalos*). This meant that they believed Jesus had the authority to heal them. They believed He could administer the mercy of God to them. In God's self-disclosure to Moses, the first description He gave was mercy. ⁶ *The LORD passed before him and*

proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," Exodus 34:6-7a Mercy is something good that we don't deserve. The lepers' plea for mercy implied that they believed their condition came upon them because of sin. So, in a sense, there wording was a confession and a plea for pardon.

¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Luke 17:14 Leviticus 13 and 14 describes how a leprous person could be declared clean/healed. They had to present themselves to the priest to show the leprosy was gone. In telling them to present themselves to the priest, Jesus was saying the mercy was granted. He did not touch them as He had done previously with a leper in Luke chapter 5, but just told them to go and show the priest they were healed. That is what a leper who was cured was to do to be accepted back into society. They headed toward the temple in faith believing Jesus' words despite what their eyes saw. As they went, all ten of them were at once healed.

This is one of the few times in the Gospels we see Jesus perform a mass healing. Missing digits and noses were suddenly restored. Scaly skin was smooth as a baby. Shrunken feet suddenly filled their sandals. They couldn't help but feel the transformation, and feeling is exactly what they had regained. I can just imagine them looking at one another and then at their own bodies. The joy and amazement must have been explosive! The previously stumbling, plodding group of lepers now ran with vigor to show themselves to the priest. They were going to be miraculously restored to their families! And what a testimony it would be to the priests who had never before seen this kind of leprosy healed!

Acting shows our faith is real. If they did not have faith in Jesus' words, they would not have gone toward the temple, which was several days journey away. James taught that our faith is seen by our works (James 2:18^{viii}, 26^{ix}). They demonstrated their faith by obeying Jesus even when their eyes did not see the results. That is how we demonstrate our faith as well, by obeying Jesus.

When Jesus says, "Fear not!" do we act on that? When He says, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34^x), will we? Our actions show our faith in His words. He tells us to not worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34^{xi}), love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27^{xii}). Are we manifesting our faith in Him by doing what He says?

¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Luke 17:15,16 Suddenly one of the ten slowed his pace and after considering what happened turned back to give thanks and praise to God first, and then threw himself at the feet of Jesus in thanks to Him. This is the only place in the New Testament where a person thanked both God and Jesus for their healing. It was with a loud voice that he did so for he was overcome with emotion at the miracle that had taken place. Falling on his face symbolizes his recognition of Jesus' status as king or prophet or even one with God. Did he suddenly realize Jesus was the priest to which he must show

himself in gratitude? Just as in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, it was one from a race despised by Jews (John 4:9^{xiii}), who acted in a godly manner (Luke 10:33^{xiv}).

The Samaritans hated Jews as well. But Samaritans like Jews expected a coming Messiah. Remember in John chapter 4 that the Samaritan woman told the town that she had found the Messiah (John 4:29^{xv}). Samaritans called Him the *talib*. They could see in their version of the Torah that He would come one day. That Samaritan town was the first to refer to Jesus as "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42^{xvi}).

It is interesting that the disease brought the two races together for survival. But it is also worth noting that the one who would least expect mercy from the Jewish Messiah is the one who turned back to give thanks. The nine Jewish lepers did not (Luke 13:30^{xvii}). The more we realize how unworthy we are, the more thankful we are for mercy received. The one who is forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47^{xviii}).

17 Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Luke 17:17,18 Jesus asked three questions back to back. "Were not ten cleansed?" Yes, and Jesus knew it was so. "Where are the nine?" "What? Did it not dawn on them that I am *the* Great High Priest, the Messiah whom they continually proclaim was coming (Hebrews 4:14^{xix})? Were they not gratefully in awe of what happened?" Just because a person receives grace in his or her life does not mean they are saved. Finally, Jesus asked if none of them returned to thank God except the foreigner? Jesus seems disappointed that His fellow Jews were so focused on the earthly realm that they did not have gratitude toward God. Sure, they were glad to be healed and eager to get back to their families. Certainly, they were obeying Jesus' command to go show themselves to the priest. But they missed a greater blessing of focusing on the Giver, the Healer, the Gracious God who had mercy on them.

Unfortunately, that is often the response even of us who have been born-again. We are so glad to have the prayer answered that we can forget to give thanks and praise to the One who made it happen. Do we stop and run back and fall on our knees and thank the Father and Son for His mercy? It is one thing to testify that God answered prayer, but it is even more important to thank God for the mercy and grace He pours out on us, especially in the answers to desperate situations. That is what altars in the Old Testament were about. They were places to give a thank offering remembering when God had shown great mercy. We ought to build altars too, whether it a prayer journal or a memoir or regular recounting of the times God has done miraculous things in answer to our pleas for mercy. You may grow tired of us telling you how God stopped the internal bleeding in my wife and covered her in a white blanket of light and peace. But that won't stop us from telling it again and again to remind us to be grateful for the mercy of our God.

19 And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." Luke 17:19 The passage literally says, "Your faith has saved you." Surely that meant to be made well, but did it also imply that his soul was saved, for he turned from the material world and his own desires to praise God's goodness and mercy? I believe that is the case. God intervenes in our lives to save us. His hand upon us whether in healing, inspiration, or divine circumstances gives us an opportunity to look up from the earth to

the Giver of all good things and realize this life is about more than His gifts. Salvation is more important than illness. It is about loving Him with a heart of gratitude.

In the second letter to the Corinthians Paul tells them that *we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are unseen, because the things that are seen are transient, and the things that are unseen are eternal* (2 Corinthians 4:18^{xx}). This leper had the faith of a mustard seed that Jesus spoke of in verse 6^{xxi}. He looked beyond the healing of his body and his desire to run home to his family and saw that praise and thanksgiving should be given to both the Father and the Son.

I was struggling the week I worked on this sermon. When I got to this passage, I realized that was what I was missing. I was with the nine who ran off focused on the transient things and forgetting the eternal. It's so easy to do. Disappointments, temptations to sin, people's words or actions, and so many transient things can take our mind off what is eternal. Think about all the things that get you upset, angry, or discouraged. As difficult as they are, I'll bet you they are transient things. We take our eyes off the wonder that we have been healed spiritually and our eternal destiny.

We are all born lepers in the sense that sin dulls our feelings toward God and eats away at our lives (Psalm 51:3-5^{xxii}). We physically mature and become even sicker. We increasingly lose feeling toward God. Our spiritual senses are increasingly dulled and even lost all together. We are in fact the walking dead (Ephesians 2:1^{xxiii}). There is no life in our spirits.

The grace of God moves us to call out to Him for mercy. He answers with grace and love, but then we run off, anxious to get back to what we called living, but what is really sleepwalking through this short life. But occasionally, there are those people who stop, turn around (which is to repent), and fall on our faces before Jesus. We give thanks to the Father and the Son for His mercy and grace. Then we arise a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xxiv}), saved by faith in Jesus, and begin to really live (John 1:4^{xxv}). He goes with us, in our spirits (John 14:23^{xxvi}).

From a spiritual perspective the nine who were physically healed ran from the truth that would heal their leprous souls. How sad! This was perhaps the greatest opportunity in their lives, and they ran from Him instead of to Him. It was a foreshadow of the Jewish rejection of Jesus and the beginning of the Times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24^{xxvii}).

We need to be like the Samaritan and realize how undeserving we are, if we are to be saved. We must turn away from the expectations of the world for more and more things to fill the void in our hearts. We must realize that we have been ungrateful and are undeserving despite all we have been given.

I remember taking a friend to a Promise Keeper event. There was in the crowd below us someone who suddenly had this realization of his desperate need for mercy. He ran to the front and fell on his face. We could not hear him over the speaker, but I imagine he was thanking God and Jesus for the mercy shown to him. The man I brought asked what in the world the man was doing. Well, at the end of the meeting when the call came to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, my friend went forward. He didn't fall on his face, but he realized he also needed to be born again. That man is often in our

congregation. God is still working on us all, to lift our faces up from the ground, from all the temporal things that distract us, to look into His glorious face and see His eyes like a flame of fire (Revelation 1:14^{xxviii}), calling us to let Him have free reign in our hearts. Will you miss the greatest opportunity in your life? Or will we, like the Samaritan, realize how undeserving we are, and in faith fall on our faces before Jesus and be saved?

Just as the lepers suddenly began to feel again and watched their bodies become whole, so we too will begin to feel spiritually the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Life suddenly floods our once dead spirit and we realize God has had mercy on us.

The next time that you are disappointed or angry over something, ask yourself if it is a temporal or eternal issue. Then consider your eternal destiny is safe in the hands of Jesus and thank the Father and the Son for what is eternal (John 10:28^{xxix}). Praise Him for your salvation, for His life in your spirit. When we are thanking God for all His goodness to us, it turns our eyes from the passing things to the eternal things that really matter.

Here are a few verses to remind us to thank God in every situation:

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:57)

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. (2 Cor. 2:14)

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Cor. 9:15)

Joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:11b-14)

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col. 3:17)

Also see Hebrews 13:15^{xxx}; Rev 4:9-11^{xxxi}; 5:11-12^{xxxii}; 2Tim 3:2^{xxxiii})^{xxxiv} -

Questions

- 1 Why does Luke take so much of his gospel to tell of the trip to Jerusalem?
- 2 What did the lepers call Jesus and why was that significant?
- 3 Why might they have expected Jesus could do something?
- 4 How did they express their faith? How do we do the same?
- 5 Why was the one who returned a surprise?
- 6 Who did he praise and thank?
- 7 What did Jesus say had saved him?
- 8 Where were the nine and why were they there?
- 9 What was different in the Samaritan?
- 10 How can that truth help us with our daily struggles?

ⁱ **2 Timothy 3:2 (ESV)**

² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

ⁱⁱ **1 Timothy 5:6 (ESV)**

⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

^{iv} **Luke 9:51 (ESV)**

⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

^v **Isaiah 9:1 (ESV)**

¹ But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

^{vi} **Leviticus 13:9-11 (ESV)**

⁹ “When a man is afflicted with a leprous disease, he shall be brought to the priest, ¹⁰ and the priest shall look.

And if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and there is raw flesh in the swelling,

¹¹ it is a chronic leprous disease in the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. He shall not shut him up, for he is unclean.

^{vii} **Luke 5:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him.

^{viii} **James 2:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

^{ix} **James 2:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

^x **John 13:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

^{xi} **Matthew 6:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

^{xii} **Luke 10:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

^{xiii} **John 4:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

^{xiv} **Luke 10:33 (ESV)**

³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.

^{xv} **John 4:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”

^{xvi} **John 4:42 (ESV)**

⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

^{xvii} **Luke 13:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

^{xviii} **Luke 7:47 (ESV)**

⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

^{xix} **Hebrews 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

^{xx} **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

^{xxi} **Luke 17:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

^{xxii} **Psalms 51:3-5 (ESV)**

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

^{xxiii} **Ephesians 2:1 (ESV)**

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

^{xxiv} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xxv} **John 1:4 (ESV)**

⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

^{xxvi} **John 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

^{xxvii} **Luke 21:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

^{xxviii} **Revelation 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire,

^{xxix} **John 10:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

^{xxx} **Hebrews 13:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

^{xxxi} **Revelation 4:9-11 (ESV)**

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

^{xxxii} **Revelation 5:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

^{xxxiii} **2 Timothy 3:2 (ESV)**

² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

^{xxxiv} Collection of Scriptures on thanks from Stephen Um - *Preaching the Word - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth.*