

The Ungrateful Dead

Luke 17:11-19 *And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.¹² And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:¹³ And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.¹⁴ And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.¹⁵ And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,¹⁶ And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.¹⁷ And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?¹⁸ There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.¹⁹ And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.*

Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. This will be His last Passover; in fact, He will become the final Passover Lamb, and be sacrificed for the sins of the whole world. He seems to go along the border of Samaria and Galilee; though it may mean he went through both of them. Either way, He enters a town, and as He enters He is met by ten lepers. As was needed, lepers would stand afar off from people, and cover their mouths as they went. They would shout, ‘Unclean, unclean’, to warn people that they were approaching. Lepers had no social contact with non-lepers; they were condemned to remain either in leper colonies or outside the walls of cities. So, it is unusual to see these men inside a town; perhaps they gathered there together, hoping to meet Jesus as He passed through.

And they begin to raise their voices with a pitiful plea, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ Jesus sees them, and says, ‘Go show yourselves to the priest.’ What did He mean by this? In the Law of Moses, a leper who was cleansed from leprosy had to undergo quite a complicated procedure before being received back into society. He had to go to the priest, who would examine him. If he was found to be without leprosy, he would take two clean birds, cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet. The one bird would be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. The other items, including the living bird, would then be dipped in the blood of the dead bird, and the priest would sprinkle the leper seven times with the blood. Then the other bird would be set free. After that, he had to shave off his hair, wash himself and his clothes, and remain outside his house for another seven days. On the seventh day, he had to do this again. On the eighth day, he had to offer two male lambs and one ewe lamb for a guilt offering. After this, he still had to present a sin offering and a burnt offering, which were procedures in themselves.

So when Jesus says, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priest,’ what is He saying? He is saying, ‘You will be healed by the time you get there!’ He was calling on them to trust Him and have faith in His power, and head for the priest as if they were already healed.

That is exactly what happened – as they were going, they were healed. It’s at this point that the miracle homes in on the main lesson of the miracle – which is gratitude. One of the men, seeing he is healed, stops. He starts to praise God with a loud voice. He turns back and falls on his face at Jesus’ feet and thanks Him.

Jesus looks around and says, ‘Weren’t there ten lepers healed? Where are the other nine? Why is the only one returning to give thanks a foreigner?’

Jesus then blesses the man, and sends him on his way saying, ‘Your faith has made you well’.

When Jesus says, ‘Where are the nine,’ what is He implying? Why are they not here giving thanks? He is implying that it is fitting for this man to be giving Him thanks, but it is

improper for the nine to not have returned. Jesus expected them to come back and express gratitude.

Here is the first main point we need to grasp:

1. Jesus Christ deserves to be thanked, and Jesus Christ expects to be thanked.

Jesus Christ deserves to be thanked. Here the Lord had just freed these men from a disease which had completely ruined their lives. He did not have to do this, but in sheer, loving kindness, He healed them. He deserved to be thanked.

Leprosy in the Bible is a picture of what? It is a picture of sin. And while leprosy would eat away at the body, sin has far greater consequences – it eats at your soul and condemns you to hell.

At one point in your life, Christ looked at you, and as you cried out to Him for mercy, He cleansed you of your sin. The reason He could do that is because He Himself was tortured and killed for your sin. He could write the debt of your sin off, because He had absorbed the offence and satisfied His own justice on the cross.

Do you know what the heavenly host are doing continually? They are giving thanks. And do you know that the angels have not been redeemed? The angels were not redeemed by God; they have never experienced salvation. And yet they thank Him.

He deserves to be thanked.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ expects to be thanked. He was glad to see the one leper returning, but asked where the other nine were. He was expecting them.

He is pleased when we thank Him for the blessing He pours on us, but He expects us to. Don't you expect the same? When you have done someone good, there is a sense in your heart that gratitude is expected.

What emotion do you experience if you help someone with money, or give them directions, or perhaps host them in your home and they walk off without saying, 'Thank you'? The judicial sentiment that God has placed in your heart gets angry. Because when you have done someone good and they respond with ingratitude, that is, in a sense, a form of returning evil for good, isn't it?

That's why God condemns unthankfulness. **Romans 1:21** says: *'because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.'*

You can tell that God expects our thanksgiving because He has sprinkled commands to be thankful throughout the Bible - **1Thes 5:18; Eph 5:20, Col 3:17.**

Now maybe you are like me and these commands to be grateful, to thank God seem a bit forced. God expecting me to be grateful, when I am not grateful, sounds on the surface like when Johnny gets a pair of red socks for Christmas from his granny, and Dad prods him and says, 'Say thank you to your grandmother,' and Johnny mumbles, 'Thank you'. We know that Johnny isn't really thankful, but he is saying it. And these commands to always be thankful seem like the Lord prodding me to do the same thing. It sounds like God needs to be thanked.

But there are two things to be remembered here:

1) God must remind us to be thankful because we are not very good at it.

A command to be thankful reminds us of how we should be, even when we aren't. A lack of gratitude when it comes to God is not that God hasn't been good; it is that our hearts are not good.

When we have received something good from the hand of God, it is right and fitting and appropriate to give thanks back to God.

2) God's commands to be thankful are invitations to be joyful.

Have you ever been truly grateful in your heart, and wished you weren't? Gratitude is a pleasurable, joyful emotion. When God is commanding us to be grateful, He is commanding us to be joyful. He does not say, 'Thank me! Thank Me!' as if He is needy of our gratitude. He commands it because grateful believers are satisfied, contented, happy believers who glorify Him.

Gratitude is one of those virtues that tends to eliminate a bunch of sins in your life. Think of it. Can you be grateful and be bitter? Can you be grateful and murmuring and complaining at the same time? Can you be grateful and discontent at the same time? Can you be grateful and be lusting at the same time? Can you be grateful and be unforgiving?

So Christ deserves to be thanked for who He is and what he has done, and He expects to be thanked. He has commanded us to thank him, not because He needs the thanks, but because it is right to recognise the good He has done for us and because when we are thankful we are joyful.

So that brings us to the 'how?' How do we grow in gratitude? God expects it, for our good, and for His glory, and He deserves it, but we are not that way. We are often like the nine instead of the one.

2. To be thankful you must realise you have received mercy.

When Jesus entered this town, what did the men cry out to Him and say? They said, 'Jesus, Master have mercy on us!'

Now, when would you say to someone, 'Have mercy on me?' Do you say it to the shopkeeper when you are asking him to show you where the flour is? Do you say it to your family members at the dinner table? Not usually.

Mercy is something you ask for when you know you deserve something else. You know you deserve a speeding fine, and you ask the cop to be merciful. You know you deserve to lose your job for dishonesty, and you ask for mercy – that you might keep it. Mercy is when you deserve something worse, and ask for something better. And if you receive mercy, what will your heart be? Your heart will be grateful.

That's why a man who has been convicted of third degree murder, and due to certain mitigating circumstances, the judge has mercy on him, as he walks out of court, he is thankful

for the sunshine, for the breeze, for being able to go into the shops, to be able to have a home to go to? Why? Because he knows he doesn't deserve any of these things.

Whatever you think you deserve sets the standard for your gratitude. Everything beneath that 'deserve-marker', you will probably grumble and complain about. Anything better, you will probably be thankful for.

So what do you and I deserve? Turn to **Ephesians 2** for a simple little phrase which sums it up.

Verse 3, '*by nature*', so this sums up who we are, '*children of wrath*'. By nature, we belong to a race; we are the children of a race which provokes God to anger. This is the Bible's short summary of what we deserve – God's fury. God's cleansing anger, to wipe us off the face of the earth, so as to stop dishonouring the image of God we carry within us, to cast us into hell where we would no longer offend the glory of God by worshipping and loving ourselves instead of God.

Now, if you set your 'deserve-marker' right where the Bible sets it, how much of your life is God being merciful to you?

People who know they have received mercy are thankful people.

3. To be thankful, you must learn to stop and return.

As these ten were on their way, they looked and the leprosy seemed to immediately clear up. And I imagine the excitement building in them, as a whole new life opened up in front of them. I imagine their pace quickening, their limping walk turning into a trot, and then a jog and then a run, as they tried out their new found wholeness, and as they wanted to get to the priest as soon as possible.

But what did the one man do? It says simply, '*He turned back.*'

He interrupted his own progress to give thanks. He stopped what he was doing, turned around and went back. Gratitude, no matter how simple, is taking extra time out to stop what you are doing and give thanks. If you are just interested in getting on with your own agenda – there is no time for thank you – it seems like a petty, extra frilly thing that will only take up time.

But if you wish to cultivate a heart of gratitude, you need to learn to interrupt your own schedule, your own thoughts, your own ways, and give thanks for the mercy you have received.

One of the ways we stop and return, is the act of remembering what God has done. Instead of just being caught in a mad stampede to make progress, make more money, make ends meet – we stop, and turn around and look back on what God has done. And we come back to His great works in our lives.

Why is a young bachelor thankful for his wife at first, but takes her for granted later? Because at first the change is fresh and new, and he knows he has received mercy. But as he goes along, the new life becomes more familiar than the old, and the memory of days of starvation recede, and he gets used to what he has. He begins to feel this is what he deserves. If he took the time to look back and remember, he would be thankful.

Why is a Christian, freshly born again, so full of gratitude? Because he has just come out of a life of meaninglessness and guilt and self-destruction! Now he has a relationship with His Creator, who loves Him, and all the promises of heaven, and he has meaning, and direction and purpose. He is abounding with gratitude over God's mercy. He is devouring his Bible, and praying, and singing, and giving testimonies and is at every service to take in more of God's Word and fellowship with God's people.

But what happens? The event of His salvation begins to recede, and he becomes more and more accustomed to the privileges of the Christian life. If he does not stop to take frequent looks back at what he was and what God has done, he begins to forget what he was. Soon, he is taking Christ for granted, taking the cross for granted. He even starts to look elsewhere for satisfaction.

This is why God keeps telling us, 'Remember what I have done. Reflect on the works of God.'

Psalm 30:4 *Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.*

Learn to stop and think back. Take some long hard looks at where you were, and think where you would have been. Think on what God should have given you and what He has given you instead.

The hymn says, 'Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.'

When **Psalm 78:11** gives the sins of the people of Israel, it says one of them was that they 'forgot His works And His wonders that He had shown them.'

They forgot, because they did not stop, and take the time to reflect. God gave them feasts, Sabbaths, festivals to reflect, if they couldn't do it on their own.

If you are too busy to stop and think about what Christ has done for you – you are too busy, period! Something needs to change in your life. Something needs to be scaled back. Something needs to be sacrificed. Because God wants you to be able to stop, return, in your mind and reflect on His goodness to you.

4. To be thankful, you must humble yourself.

This man comes back to Jesus and what does he do? He falls on his face. He humbles himself in a public act of gratitude. He says to everyone watching, 'I am what I am because of Jesus Christ.'

Saying thank you from the heart is humbling yourself. Gratitude is admitting that you have received grace. You didn't deserve it, but an act of kindness has been done to you.

Pride cannot say thank you except through very tight lips. Pride does not want to see itself as a recipient of mercy. A man who thinks the world owes him everything does not feel gratitude; he in fact feels frustrated that more people don't serve him on his time more often.

To do the previous two things, you need humility. To recognise you have received mercy means you must humble yourself. It's interesting, but the previous parable Jesus taught

teaches something about humility, which is relevant. He says a servant doesn't deserve a thank you for doing his job, that's what he is there to do. When we see ourselves as we should, we will not stand around with our hand out waiting for God to tip us; we will say, 'We are unprofitable servants – we've done what we were supposed to do.' And yet, all around you, you will see that God has blessed you and blessed you and blessed you.

It also takes humility to be willing to stop and reflect. Proud people are so self-absorbed, they will tell you they don't have time to stop and think about God's work in their lives.

You see, the nine would have told you, 'Sure, we'll thank Jesus, later, but right now we've got to get to the priest. Right now, we need to do the most important thing.' And would they have ever got to say, 'Thank you?'

Gratitude becomes a neglected duty, when we are too concerned with getting ahead, and not humbling ourselves to acknowledge who is letting us get ahead, who is enabling us to make progress, who is keeping us alive to see each of these days.

We look at these men and we shake our heads, but they are pictures of us. Notice again, it is a Samaritan who is doing right, and the people of God are doing wrong. It was the priests and the Levites that left the man on the side of the road and the Samaritan that helped him. And it is a Samaritan that returns thanks. The rebuke is to God's people. You of all should be a thankful people.