

The Unusual Act of Thanksgiving – Luke 17:11-19

Introduction – “Gratitude is a rare thing...If you search the world around, among all choice spices you shall scarcely meet with the frankincense of gratitude. It ought to be as common as the dew-drops that hang upon the hedges in the morning; but, alas, the world is dry of thankfulness to God! Gratitude to Christ was scarce enough in his own day...” - Spurgeon. Brothers and sisters, this should not be, and more importantly, this does not have to be.

“Where are the Nine?” (Luke 17:11-19) – In the greatest of possible miracles (for a leper), Jesus gives immeasurable and immediate mercy. But the passage is given to us to demonstrate the appalling lack of thanksgiving. Those who would have most easily given thanks didn’t. How often, when it is most easy, do we lack gratitude? Instead, we tend to think that God should be grateful to us for all of our wonderful works (vv7-10).

An Easy Excuse – But wait. Weren’t they obeying Jesus? “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” They went to church, just like they were supposed to. This morning, you might be coming to church, only, or you might be coming to Jesus. Which is it? What did your singing sound like? Do your Amens sound like “yes, me too, I agree” or do they sound like “whatever...”? In contrast to the Nine, the Samaritan (an outcast) comes to the true Temple of God and the true Priest of God and finds everlasting life for his soul. He was already healed and yet Jesus said, “*your faith has made you well.*” What does faith look like? Look at this leper.

Another – But you weren’t healed today. And coming to Jesus for salvation was an “event” that took place a long time ago. Imagine all of the difficulties in the lives of these healed lepers – jobs, families, finances, relationships... Imagine also if you were the friend of this Samaritan ten years later. What would you remind him of in times of difficult trials when he was tempted not to be grateful?

A Fallen Response (Rom 1:18-23) - Creation declares the glory of God, and fallen man refuses to acknowledge it. But this created world is also full of gifts for us from God, and fallen man, refusing to acknowledge God, also refuses to be thankful. A life full of blessings but lacking thanksgiving leads to futility in thinking, a darkened heart, and a foolish man. How vulnerable are you to this futility? It is measured simply by how thankful you are.

Thankful or Drunk (Eph 5:18-21) - While Romans 1 is the description of an unsaved man, it certainly remains a temptation in our flesh as well, which is why Paul exhorts us in Eph 5:20 “*giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. In this passage we see the same problem occurs. Either we are always giving thanks (along with other manifestations of the Holy Spirit in us), or we try to escape reality because we think it is so bad.

Fighting Unbelief/Anxiety/Apathy with Gratitude (1 Thess 5:16-18) – Whenever one believes his circumstances are overwhelming and someone quotes these verses, it often feels like nails scraping down a chalkboard. Useless and irritating. But these are commands with the very promise you are looking for in your situation and there is no requirement that you “feel” like it before you obey. Think for a moment: do you teach your children to say “thank you” only when they feel it in their heart?

See Christ’s Unending Care (Phil 4:5b-7) – Paul was in prison when he wrote these words. He is writing as one who knows the temptation to be anxious, to find life not going as expected, to find answers to prayers not coming as one might hope, to find the grind of life a bit much and one’s station not exactly comfortable. But quoting Psalm 145:18 (“...*the Lord is near*” – because he sang psalms in prison), Paul writes to never be anxious. The blunt and hard truth: unbelieving worry is always a sin. Our health, our finances, our children, our death, our spouse or lack thereof – we are to be anxious for nothing. Jesus said the same thing and just as fervently (Matt 6:25ff). To be anxious in present circumstances is to look like unbelievers.

Do What? – You cannot simply put off anxiety. You have to do something. So, we are invited/commanded to make our supplications known to God (or cast all our cares upon Him – 1 Pet 5:7). But that is not enough. We must do so “*with thanksgiving.*” This is our protection from idolatry and futile thinking: gratitude (Rom 1:21). This is thanksgiving for what has happened in the past, what is happening now, what is promised in the future.

The Promise of Peace (v7) – This is a peace that is beyond understanding of the external circumstances. It doesn’t make sense to hearts of unbelief and it doesn’t even make sense to us unless we rest in God’s sovereign control. It is the peace that lets us say with faith, “*if God is for us, who can be against us...*” (Rom 8:31ff). And this peace will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Thanksgiving is a Weapon – A Christian observation of Thanksgiving is not supposed to be a day of sentimental feelings. If that is what it is supposed to be, most of us know it will so often fail. Thanksgiving is something we are given (not just the Day but the ongoing act) in order to attack unbelief, apathy, despondency, anxiety or hopelessness. And this means that it is something we use when these things are in our lives – it is not something to hope for one day when these difficult trials are gone. “*Thanksgiving is not what we fight for. Thanksgiving is what we fight with*” – Douglas Wilson.