

Andrew K. Frey

Thanksgiving

Luke 17:11-19

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

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

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

¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” (NIV 84)

Theme: Remember to say, ‘Thank You’

1. To Whom
2. For What

When a kid is given something—whether it’s a present, a new toy, or something as simple as a glass of water, his parents remind him to say “Thank you.” Why? As the Geico commercial says, “it’s just what you do.” It’s the polite thing to do; because not saying “thank you” is rude and inconsiderate; because you want to acknowledge that the person who gave you something didn’t need to give you anything and you are grateful for the gift. It may be “just what you do” but that doesn’t mean many people do it.

That reminds me of a man named Edward Spencer. It was September 8, 1860 and a schooner called the *Augusta* collided with the passenger ship *Lady Elgin* on the waters of Lake Michigan. As the *Lady Elgin* sank, many jumped into the water, clinging to whatever they could as they struggled toward the Illinois shores. On the shore a group of students from Northwestern University put together a rescue mission. Tying a rope around his waist, Edward Spencer, who was 17 at the time, swam out to the struggling passengers and then had his comrades would pull them to shore. Edward and his friends did this for over six hours and rescued seventeen people. But the rescue mission took its toll. So great was Edward’s strain that he lost his health and spent the

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rest of his life in a wheelchair. Over 300 died in that accident, but it would have been even worse if not for the efforts of Spencer. Years later Edward was asked what he remembered most about that tragic day. He replied, “I recall the fact that not one of the seventeen people thanked me for saving their lives.”

Jesus ran into a similar situation. On his way to Jerusalem Jesus met a group of 10 lepers. These men had some sort of contagious skin disease. They were forced to live outside of any town or wilderness. They weren’t allowed to be near anyone who was “clean” since their skin disease made them “unclean.” They were apart from their families; they couldn’t hold a job; and some of them would have died from their disease. So they called out for Jesus mercy. So he told them to go and show themselves to the priests; because only the priests could declare someone clean who previously had a contagious skin disease.

On the way to the priest they noticed that they had been healed. But only one man—a Samaritan, a foreigner, who typically did not associate with Jews—and Jesus was a Jew, came back and thanked Jesus and gave glory to God. Only one.

Around Thanksgiving I don’t think too many of us are going to forget to give thanks! That is the beauty of Thanksgiving—the national holiday of obligatory thanks. We get together with relatives in front of a huge feast and watch some football and be thankful—maybe even choosing a thing or two that we are really thankful for—like friends, family, or your Xbox One.

How do you do the rest of the year in giving thanks? Is it a case of once Thanksgiving is over you are good on your “Thanks Yous” for a year. Maybe, but maybe not; many, if not, most of us say “thank you” to people all the time. We probably finish our meals with the words from the Psalms, “O give thanks to the Lord...” But is that what it means to be thankful—just saying the words? Of course not. To be thankful is to have a feeling of gratitude and joy because you have been given a gracious gift. And often, even in our “thank yous” that is missing. We simply say it because it’s just what you do.

And a question that many people never answer on Thanksgiving is to whom are you thankful. I’m thankful for this and for that, they say—but to whom? To no one in general—just glad that you have close friends and a loving family. To say, “Thank you” is of course

important, but the motivation behind it and to whom you thank is just as important as thanking in the first place.

Look at that one Samaritan man who returned to Jesus. What did he return for? He bowed down before Jesus and he thanked him for healing and purifying him as he also gave glory to God. He realized that he didn't purify himself; but Jesus had healed him, and so he returned to thank Christ. And notice what Jesus said to him, **your faith as healed you**. To give thanks to the Lord is to worship him; it is an act of faith. It is acknowledging that the Lord is the one who has given you these gifts—none of which you have earned or deserved. Confessing along with James that, every good and gracious gift comes from above. It is praising him because of his love and mercy that extends forever. So as we thank others and are thankful this Thanksgiving—and I pray that you do and are, let us not forget to thank the one who graciously gives us all things, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But for what should we thank him? It's easy to give God thanks for the things that we enjoy, or the things that we can easily see are a benefit to us. After all, he is the one who gives us all things. But what about the things that we don't enjoy or see as a benefit to us, like the hard financial troubles, the health issues, the friend or neighbor who mistreated you? We'll thank the Lord for the good times, and the things we like and enjoy. But often instead of thanking the Lord for the troubles and hardships we complain to him about them. We wonder why he mistreats us, is not looking out for us, or is not taking away each and every problem.

Again we see that thanking the Lord is an act of worship. To thank the Lord for each and everything in your life—even the bad things, is an act of faith. It is confessing that the Lord knows better than you do and that he will make everything turn out for your spiritual well-being one way or another. It's believing that as you turn to the Word in times of trouble and hardship he will use that Word to strengthen your faith in him. And so we thank the Lord for all things—even for the bad. But the translation, **your faith has healed you**, isn't the best translation. Literally Jesus said, **your faith has saved you**. God doesn't promise that because we believe we will have earthly blessing after earthly blessing. He doesn't say that if you believe or if you have a strong enough faith he will heal you from all your physical ailments

or will bless you financially. Rather he says the exact opposite—that you will have trouble and difficulty in this life because you are a sinner living in a sin-filled world. So we look to him and his gift on the cross and know that no matter what happens we'll be in heaven! See, that is a promise that he does give us. He promises to save us—in fact he already has! And not save us from sickness, disease, or financial problems—but a much bigger issue: eternal death because of our sins. Through the gift of his one and only son we are saved. For this son, Jesus Christ, suffered and died in our place to remove the guilt of all our sins and he rose from the dead to guarantee that we too will live even though we die.

Jesus did this Jesus did for the whole world. And it is received only through faith in him as our one and only Savior. That is why Jesus told the thankful Samaritan, **your faith has saved you**. For faith in Christ saves, and this man had faith in Christ, which was worked in him by the Holy Spirit! And this gift of salvation is the only thing we need; and it is worth more than anything else. So even if we didn't have anything else, we can still thank the Lord.

So this Thanksgiving and every day, let us give credit where credit is due and give thanks to the Lord. For everything we have is a gift from God. We give thanks not because it's the nice thing to do or because it's inconsiderate not to do so. But out of faith, love, and thanks, let us give thanks to the Lord with our whole heart—for the good and for the bad, and especially for our salvation. And the Lord will say the same to you as he said to the Thankful Samaritan: **your faith has saved you**. Amen.