



**“A Grateful Faith”**  
Luke 17:11-19

**Idea:** A grateful faith never gets over the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

**Intro:** Thanksgiving is one of America’s great national holidays, and Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln helped solidify its observance. The Pilgrims, however, were the first ones to observe a day of thanksgiving in America, and they did so amidst the bleakest of conditions. They made seven times more graves than huts during their first year in the new world. As H. W. Westermeier reminds us, “No Americans have been more impoverished than those – who, nevertheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving.” Those men and women who crossed over the Atlantic Ocean on the *Mayflower* did so in pursuit of new opportunities. Most of them were followers of Jesus Christ who were seeking a place to raise their families where there was religious freedom. As such, after their first year in the new world, they thought it proper to celebrate the Lord’s favor and give thanks to Him even though the year had been brutally hard for all and deadly for some. Gratitude was an expression of their faith in God.

The Roman philosopher Cicero astutely said, “A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues.” I believe he is correct. The disposition of gratitude seems to be the exact opposite of that which radiates from the hearts of those who are in rebellion against God, which has been seen from the beginning. Many scholars believe the telling of Babylon’s fall given in the prophecy of Isaiah harkens back to Lucifer’s rebellion and fall. He once enjoyed great favor and blessings from God, but they were not enough for him. Lucifer desired not just more but to replace God.

[Read Isaiah 14:11-15.](#)

Pride is the parent of rebellion, selfishness, and dissatisfaction. On the other hand, gratitude is the parent of faithfulness, selflessness, satisfaction, and every other virtue. Sin, which is the default nature of humanity, emulates its master. Satan is never satisfied or thankful. For this reason, sin within the human heart is neither satisfied nor thankful. Therefore, the thanklessness we may see in our culture today is not new to our time. Alexander Whyte, the great Scottish preacher of the nineteenth century, once visited an elderly parishioner who complained at length about everything and everyone. Finally, hat in hand, Whyte rose to bid her good-bye. His only comment was from Psalm 103:2, “*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits...*”.

I believe there has never been another time in history where people have had so much but with so little gratitude. Many years ago, R. Kent Hughes, commenting on this reality said, “Consider the typical Ivy League sophomore. From birth he has lacked nothing. He has had loving, doting parents and grandparents, the best in medical care, music lessons, tennis lessons, family vacations, summer sailing school, trendy wardrobes, religious instruction, European educational experiences, special work experiences, distinctive cars, and credit

cards. Yet he is an angry, ungrateful, depressed ‘poor me.’ He appreciates nothing. He regards his family as a nuisance. He focuses on shortcomings and slights in his upbringing, holding on to grudges with a death-grip. It never occurs to him that some of his happy friends have had it rougher than him.” Hughes went on to say that ungratefulness has always been endemic to the human soul, but he pointed out that it was cresting in Generation X. Well, I am part of Gen-X, and unfortunately thanklessness did not crest with this generation. It has gotten even worse among the Millennials and Gen-Z, which is evident from the restlessness and dissatisfaction that is so apparent among the younger people in America today. Could it be that many of the societal problems we relate to poor mental health are nothing more than the effects of ingratitude?

Lest we think Christians are immune to this disease, let me remind you that the culture of the church is not. The disease of thanklessness can attach itself to believers if we are not careful and intentional with our gratitude. Surely, we have all met an ungrateful Christian, which is a contradiction in terms. This person claims to know Jesus but complains about everything and everyone. He or she has forgotten the goodness and the grace of God. In this next pericope, Luke will remind us that a grateful faith never gets over the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

Read Luke 17:11-19.

**Inquiry:** Luke tells us that on the outskirts of an unnamed village on the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee, ten leprosy men stood before Jesus in various stages of decay. With their clothing torn in perpetual mourning and their skeletal heads uncovered, they cried out with their lips to warn others saying, “Unclean, unclean.” These men looked like they had climbed out of the graves, but they were alive, sensitive human beings, feeling souls living in the nether world of society’s fringe while they rotted away. On this day, they shouted from a safe distance to Jesus, begging for Him to have mercy on them because they had heard the stories of healing. They were loud and persistent.

When Jesus saw and heard them, He immediately responded. Unlike other times, however, Jesus did not touch them or declare them to be clean (5:13). Instead, He simply told them to go and present themselves to the priest as the Law required of someone who had been healed (Lev 13:19). The Lord’s command required faith, and we presume that not all the lepers were of the same mind. No ten people would be. Some were convinced they should go to the priest immediately. Others expressed doubts. Nevertheless, because they had nothing to lose, the consensus was to give it a try. So, they set off to see a priest.

As they stumbled along, “*they were cleansed.*” It was a mass healing. There were no mirrors to reflect the dramatic change, but they saw it in each other instantly. From cadaverous faces reemerged ears, noses, eyebrows, lashes, and hairlines. Feet that were minutes ago toeless, ulcerated stubs were suddenly whole. Knobby appendages grew fingers. Barnacled skin became soft and supple. It was like ten new births. The dust of a wild celebration quickly began in the bright sunlight.

Among those ten lepers was a Samaritan. The New Testament informs us that normally Jews would “*have no dealings with Samaritans*” (John 4:9). There was a racial hatred on both sides among the two peoples. Nevertheless, these ten men put aside their racial differences and united around their common misery. Interestingly, after the healing, it was the Samaritan man and not the Jews who returned to Jesus to express his gratitude.

When the Samaritan returned, he did not stand at a distance and shout to Jesus like before. Now, as a man who had been made clean by the Lord, he came near and bowed at Jesus’ feet (vs. 16). Luke offers here a beautiful contrast between a life marked by sin and a life marked by redemption. Sin separates a person from the Creator God, while the Savior removes the barrier and brings the person back into relationship with the God who created the individual for Himself.

As we imagine what it would have been like to live such a life, hopefully we can understand why they cried out for mercy. Humanly speaking, their situation was hopeless. You see, in our sin we differ very little from these

ten lepers. According to Paul, we are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). Therefore, in our sin, we all stand before Jesus in various stages of decay. We stand at a distance, separated from God. For this reason, we should all cry out to God in faith for mercy. When His mercy is granted, then the right and proper response will always be gratitude. There are three actions of a grateful faith that are on display in this story.

### **1. Acknowledges the lordship of Jesus.** (vs. 13)

These ten lepers had clearly heard the stories of miraculous healing and resurrection conducted by Jesus throughout the region. So, when the men realized He was in their village on this day, they came to Him, seeking a miracle. As they asked Jesus for help, they recognized His authority by addressing Him as “*Master*” (ἐπιστάτης). Luke is the only gospel writer to use this term. In other Synoptic parallel passages where ἐπιστάτης is used by Luke, Matthew and Mark use the terms διδάσκαλος (teacher), ῥαββί (rabbi), or κύριος (Lord). It is also interesting that this is the only use of the title by nondisciples in Luke, which confirms the lepers’ trust in Jesus’ reputation. They acknowledged His lordship over disease and infirmities.

As we strive to see ourselves in the ten lepers, we must understand that saving/redeeming faith begins with an acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord. Paul said in Romans 10:9, “*if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*” As sinners who are separated from the God who created us and desires to know us, like the lepers, we must acknowledge Jesus’ lordship and power over the terminal disease of sin, which affects us all. He is the only One who can cure and remove our sin.

There was no cure for leprosy in the first century. When a person was diagnosed with it, it was a sentence of separation and death. Likewise, there is no earthly cure for sin. It is a sentence of separation from God and eternal death. No person can scrub it away, work it away, or buy it away. Sin is internal. It is a matter of the heart, which is in rebellion against God. The only hope and cure for it is found in Jesus Christ. Therefore, like the lepers the first step to being healed of this terminal disease is an acknowledgement of Jesus’ lordship and power over sin.

### **2. Asks and believes Jesus for healing.** (vs. 13)

The ten lepers asked Jesus as the Master to have mercy on them. This call for mercy is a request to someone of superior position to show compassion. Such cries for mercy (ἐλεέω) were frequent during Jesus’ ministry (Matt 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30-31). By asking for Jesus to have mercy on them they were pleading to be instantly healed, which is evident in the form of the verb. It reflects an urgent request. By raising their voices, they were able to get the Lord’s attention.

These men asked Jesus for mercy, believing He could and possibly would heal them of their terminal disease and suffering. They believed the stories being told about Jesus and His miracles. Perhaps, they had known the leper that Jesus had touched and healed in Luke 5:13. His transformation was undeniable, so they wanted the same for themselves.

Like the lepers who were healed, when Jesus forgives a man, woman, or child of sin there is an undeniable transformation that takes place. The old life of sin and its lifestyle goes away, and it is replaced with a new life and lifestyle (2 Cor 5:17). The things the person used to live for and enjoy are no longer his or her desire because that individual is a new creation in Christ with a new nature. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you know this to be true. More than likely, if you are not a Christian, then you too know it to be true. You have witnessed this transformation in the people you know who love and follow Jesus. This glorious and miraculous healing takes place simply by asking and believing Jesus for it.

Jesus told the men to go and show themselves to the priest (vs. 14). They believed Jesus and obeyed, so while stumbling along the road to the priest their healing came. Again, Paul says in Romans, “*if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*” Saving faith is believing that Jesus as the Savior has paid your sin debt upon the cross and has been raised from the dead as the conqueror of death.

### **3. Adores Jesus with a humble and grateful heart. (vs. 15-16)**

Ten lepers were healed of leprosy, but only one of the ten men returned to express gratitude to Jesus for it. He was a Samaritan; he was an outsider. The miracle of his healing necessitated two thank you's. First, he praised God with a loud voice. He shouted his joy for God's mercy. Second, he fell at Jesus' feet and thanked Him. His theology was not fully formed. He was not yet aware that to praise God and Jesus is to adore the same God. Nevertheless, he returns joyfully to Jesus not just because he has been physically restored but also because he is confident that he has been socially restored. The Lord had changed the Samaritan's life, and because of that reality the man could not help but adore Him from a humble and grateful heart.

Luke wants his readers to identify with the Samaritan's faith. He wants his readers to adore Jesus out of a humble and grateful heart. His grace and mercy deserve it. It is important to take note that Jesus never demanded their praise after they were healed. He was disappointed when only one of the ten men returned because His miracle of healing was worthy of their praise. Jesus expects those who have been changed by His power to never get over Him and His work. He expects a grateful faith.

**Conclusion:** All ten men were exposed to Jesus, and all ten were healed of leprosy. The sentence of death they all had received when leprosy was found on their skin was reversed by Him. Life in this world was prolonged. They now had the opportunity to live to be old men and see their grandchildren's children. The miracle was worth their praise, but only one man offered his praise to God and expressed a grateful faith. In response to him, Jesus said, “*your faith has made you well.*” He was not healing him physically again. He was healing his soul. He was forgiving his sin. The term translated “well” is σωζω, which means “save” or “deliver.” It is the same term Paul used in Romans 10:9.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, we see that Jesus was on a mission to save people from their sin. This was the purpose for which He had come. He worked to accomplish this mission by preaching the message of the Kingdom, welcoming the outcasts, and healing the sick. His grace and mercy were fully on display for all to see and experience, and many people did experience His healing touch. Some also expressed faith in Him as more than a miracle worker and teacher. They expressed faith in Him as Lord and Savior. To these Jesus granted forgiveness of sin and a place in His Kingdom. They were given new life. This Samaritan responded in faith to Jesus, and He was given new and eternal life. This new life he never got over. Luke would have all who are dead in their sin to cry out to Jesus in faith. Likewise, those who have experienced Jesus's healing touch must never get over it.