

THE NINE, WHERE ARE THEY?

Luke 17:11-19

Ezekiel, Oghenekaro

Gratitude is the mother of humility. One of the great needs of our day is the need for gratitude. We have been greatly blessed, but we tend to take our blessings for granted. Paul wrote, *“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude” (1 Timothy 4:4)*. Frankly, our sermon today is not intended to educate the mind, but to stir the heart and prick the conscience (*2 Peter 1:12, 13*).

Ingratitude In Jesus’ Day

Luke 17 says, *“And it came about . . . that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee”* (v. 11b). Jesus would have been traveling west toward the Jordan River. *“And . . . He entered a certain village”* (v. 12a). Luke does not give the name of the village; it is unimportant. As Jesus entered the village, *“ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him”* (v. 12b). Lepers could not enter towns, but they could come to the gates to ask for alms. These lepers were probably near the entrance of the village as Jesus was about to enter. At least one man was a Samaritan (v. 16). From Jesus’ later statements, it is obvious that most or the rest were Jews (v. 18). Tragic circumstances had thrown these mortal enemies —Jews and Samaritans— together.

To appreciate the story fully, we need to know something about the ailment these ten men had. The affliction which the Bible calls leprosy was a dreaded disease which was highly contagious. Those who have studied the disease tell us that leprosy was a nauseating/disgusting sight. At first the disease discoloured the skin—it would turn pink, then brown, then black. It ulcerated into sores, ravaging, and destroying both skin and bone. Death was inevitable within two years. In your mind, see these ten outcasts holding up fingerless hands, handless arms. Eyes, ears, or noses may have been missing. These were dirty, haggard, defeated, unwanted, without families, jobs, or normalcy. Leprosy was both debilitating and humiliating. Verse 12 notes that they *“stood at a distance.”*

When these ten lepers saw Jesus, *“they raised their voices”* (v. 13a). The nature of the disease affected the vocal cords. Tuberculosis was often associated with the affliction. The voice became hoarse and harsh. Here were ten men, fifty yards away, crying with ruined voices, trying to get Jesus’ attention. They cried, *“Jesus,*

Master, have mercy on us!” (v. 13b). No doubt they desired healing, but specifically they asked for mercy, pity, and understanding. They not only needed healing of the body; they also needed healing of the mind and soul. Jesus would have been surrounded by a noisy crowd. Perhaps He did not hear them at first. When He did, he looked around and at last spotted them off in the distance. He said to them, *“Go and show yourselves to the priests” (v. 14b).*

Earlier, Jesus had healed another leper. On that occasion, Jesus had touched him and said, *“Be cleansed” (Luke 5:13).* After the man was healed, Jesus told him to go show himself to the priest as the law commanded. One of the jobs of the priests was to serve as health inspectors. If the priests concluded that a leper was healed, the man could offer certain sacrifices and then re-enter society. He could return home to his family, go back to work, go to the temple. This time, however, Jesus did not go to these lepers or touch them or heal them on the spot. Rather, He challenged them with a test of faith — to go and show themselves to the priests as though they had already been healed! *(If the NIV is right about the location of this story—the border between Galilee and Samaria—these ten lepers had a great distance to travel to go all the way to Jerusalem!)*

The next part of the story is thrilling: *“And it came about that as they were going, they were cleansed” (v. 14c).* Since the Samaritan was able to turn back and find Jesus, I assume that the ten had not gone far before they were cleansed. Imagine what it would have been like as soundness returned to their bodies—as their eyes, ears, and throats were healed; as old sores dropped off and the skin became healthy; as new bones formed, were covered with new muscle structure with new veins and arteries, the whole body covered with new skin as health and vigour began to pulsate through their whole bodies! What excitement must have filled their hearts! *“I am whole again!” “I can go home again!” “I can return to society!” “I can go to the temple again!”* Note the similarities between these ten men:

- All were afflicted with a terrible disease.
- All determined to do something about it.
- All believed that Jesus could help in some way.
- All appealed to Jesus.
- All obeyed Jesus and started on the way to where the priests were.
- All were healed. The similarity ends there.

Verse 15 begins, *“Now one of them.” “Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back” (v. 15a).* No doubt he later made the trip Jesus had commanded. First, however, he wanted to express his overflowing appreciation. He *“turned back, glorifying God” (v. 15b).* He understood that God had given Jesus the power to heal. He glorified God *“with a loud voice” (v. 15c)*—not with the hoarse cry of a leper, but with the strong voice of a healed man! *“And he fell on his face at [Jesus’] feet, giving thanks to Him” (v. 16a).* He recognized Jesus as deity and fell at His feet, worshipping Him and giving Him thanks. *“Giving thanks”* is in the

present tense, indicating that the healed man kept on thanking Jesus. The next short sentence comes almost as a shock in the narrative: “*And he was a Samaritan*” (v. 16b). Often, we receive appreciation from those we least expect to show it, while those from whom we expect thanks often take our efforts for granted. Can you hear the sadness in Jesus’ voice in verse 17? “*And Jesus answered and said, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they?’*” One would have expected these men to run and sing praises and appreciate the goodness of God upon their lives.

However, they did not. Why? **Burton Coffman** has these tongue-in-cheek suggestions:

- *One waited to see if the cure was real.*
- *One waited to see if it would last.*
- *One said he would see Jesus later.*
- *One decided he had never had leprosy.*
- *One said he would have gotten well anyway.*
- *One gave the glory to the priests.*
- *One said, “Oh well, Jesus didn’t really do anything.”*
- *One said, “Just any rabbi could have done it.”*
- *One said, “I was already much improved.”*

Jesus then sadly asked, “*Was no one found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?*” (v. 18). “*And He said to him, ‘Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well’*” (v. 19). When Jesus said, “*Your faith has made you well,*” He may have been stating the obvious. Perhaps, however, Jesus was pronouncing a special blessing on this man because he had been thankful. After all, even the nine ungrateful Jews had been made whole physically. In the original language, this passage literally reads, “*Your faith has saved you.*” Possibly, Jesus was saying, “*Your faith and the expression of it in giving thanks has made you well both physically and spiritually.*” In other words, “*Salvation has come to [your] house*” (**Luke 19:9**)!

Ingratitude In Our Day

We stand on one side and look at the statistics in this story: Only 1 out of 10 returned to give Jesus thanks—only 10 percent! —and we are shocked. Then we stop and think. Is the percentage any better today? All of us know that ingratitude is terrible, but how much does this knowledge really impact our lives? As we read the story of the 1 out of 10 who returned to thank Jesus, each of us needs to ask the question “*What’s my GQ?*”: “*What’s my Gratitude Quotient?*” The Bible puts great stress on being thankful: And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful (**Colossians 3:15**). *Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving* (**Colossians 4:2**). *In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus* (**1**

Thessalonians 5:18). What a challenge is in the words *“In everything give thanks”!* We always have something to be thankful for.

The story is told of a man who was noted for always seeing the good in any situation and thanking God for it. One day there was a terrible winter storm. Everything was covered with a thick blanket of ice, sleet, and snow. Power lines were down, and most activity ground to a halt. Only a handful, including this man, were able to make it to the regular prayer meeting. The few who were there waited to hear what this man could find good to thank the Lord for. When it came his turn to pray, he said, *“Lord, we thank You that the weather is not always like this!”* Most of us need to have the good in a situation pointed out to us. Again, this is a story of another family. It was Thanksgiving Day in America. The whole family had gathered, including Uncle Mort. Before they ate, they went around the table, saying what they were thankful for. When it was Mort’s turn, he said, *“Pass.”* The little fellow seated next to him said, *“Wait a minute. You got to tell us what you’re thankful for, Uncle Mort.”* Mort snorted, *“I have got nothing to be thankful for.”* The boy looked at the golden-brown bird in the middle of the table, then said, *“At least you can be thankful you aren’t a turkey!”*

The Bible also speaks on the sin of being unthankful. When Paul spoke of the sad state of humanity in his day, he wrote: *“For even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God, or give thanks” (Romans 1:21)*. When he later wrote of the sad condition of mankind in days ahead, he said, *“For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, . . .” (2 Timothy 3:2)*.

It is easier for us to point our fingers at the nine and say, these men were ungrateful. It is not our place, however, to judge others. Our concern is about ourselves. Are we as thankful as we should be? Let us take a few moments for self-examination.

Are we as thankful as we should be in our homes? Is it only coincidence that when Paul listed the sins of mankind in **2 Timothy 3**, immediately after *“disobedient to parents”* he put *“ungrateful”*? I do not know if that is a coincidence, but I do know that many of us are ungrateful to our parents. At times in our lives, if they had not cared for us, a week’s neglect would have killed us. In our early years we were dependent on our parents for everything. Too often, the time comes when an aged parent is a nuisance and young people are unwilling to repay the debt they owe. As Shakespeare’s King Lear said in the day of his own tragedy: *“How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child!”*

Are we as thankful as we should be to our fellowman? When we think of ingratitude to our fellowman, many biblical illustrations come to mind: Laban, who did not appreciate the efforts of Jacob, his son-in-law (cf. **Genesis 31:6, 7**); the butler who forgot Joseph in prison (**Genesis 40:23**); the children of Israel who

were ready to stone Moses, who had liberated them (**Exodus 17:1-4**); and Saul, whose life was spared by David, but who still sought to kill the young man (**2 Samuel 16:1, 2**). Each of us owes great debts to many people. They may be friends, brothers or sisters in Christ, or teachers. Some of us may be indebted to doctors, perhaps surgeons, who saved our lives. Have we said, “Thank you”? Let us do it before it is too late! Sometimes at funerals people try to make up for words unsaid by telling the lifeless body in the casket, “I love you! I appreciate you! I care about you!” It is too late then.

This brings us to the most important part of the self-examination: **Are we as thankful as we should be to God?** Surely, the most grievous failing of each of us is a failure to say, “Thank You,” to God for all His blessings. The psalmist said, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits” (**Psalms 103:2**). What “benefits” was the psalmist speaking of? Let us start with those suggested by **Matthew 5:45**: “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Is it enough to thank God we have sunshine and rain; the sun, moon, and stars; chicken, snail, fishes, rice, eggs, and even garri. We even have our daily routines. “Consider what great things He has done for you” (**1 Samuel 12:24**). Have you ever been sick and gotten well? Were you brought up in a Christian home? Have you had the opportunity to hear, know, and obey the gospel? Did you receive a Christian education? Did you find a mate who also loves the Lord? Has the Lord given you children? Have you had the privilege of knowing some of God’s great saints? Someone has said that the hardest arithmetic to master is the ability to count our blessings. Most of all, we should be thankful for what Paul called God’s “incredible gift” (**2 Corinthians 9:15**), the gift of Jesus.

If we are thankful, how do we express our thankfulness? When we meet around the Lord’s table, “the nine—where are they?” When the collection plate passes, “the nine—where are they?” When we meet on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, “the nine—where are they?” When we meet on Friday evening, to learn how to sing the Master’s praise, “the nine—where are they?” When it is time for visitation and evangelism, so we can share the greatest blessing, the blessing of salvation, “the nine—where are they?” Spend a few moments thinking of all God has done for you, then give Him thanks. Do not leave Him with a heavy heart, asking the question “The nine—where are they?”

CONCLUSION

One of the most practical ways to express your thanks is to do what He has commanded you to do. If you need to be baptized—or restored as an erring child of God—why not take care of that need at once? If you really appreciate what the Lord has done for you, you will not wait or hesitate!

This sermon is credited to Truth for Today – The Nine, Where Are They?