

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, November 20, 2011 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**A Lifestyle of Thanksgiving - Luke 17:11-19**

**Introduction:** A dog walks into a butcher shop carrying a purse in its mouth. He puts the purse down and sits in front of the meat case. The butcher says, "What do you want?" "Want to buy some meat?" "Woof!" barks the dog. "Hmm," says the butcher. "What kind? Pork, Chicken, Steak ..." "Woof!" interrupts the dog. "And how much steak? Half a pound, one pound ..." "Woof!" barked the dog. So the butcher wraps up the pound of steak and finds the money in the dog's purse. As the dog leaves the butcher follows. The dog goes up to a house and begins scratching at a door. An angry man opens the door, and lets the dog in. "Stop!" yells the butcher. "He's the most intelligent animal I've ever seen!" "Intelligent?" says the man. "This is the third time this week he's forgotten his key." He wasn't thankful.

Contrast that to the story of a man who worked in the city where he lived. Every morning, on his way to work, he'd pass by a woman dressed in shabby clothes begging for change in front of a church. Although she was begging, the lady would greet everyone with a smile and a pleasant "Good morning." Almost every day, the man would give her something. But after a couple of months of this routine, the woman disappeared. The man wondered what had happened to her.

Then, one day, as the man walked to work, he spotted the woman again in front of the church. She was still dressed in those shabby clothes. As he passes by her, he reached into pocket for some change, but the woman stopped him. "I want to say thank you for helping me all those days before," she said. "But you won't have to help me anymore because tomorrow, I start a new job." With that, she reached into a bag and handed the man a homemade flower. This time, she's there, not for a handout, but so that she could say "Thank you." She was truly thankful.

Today, we're going to see another person who was truly thankful. As we talk about this person, I want us to think about our own thankful attitude or lack of it, and see what it says about us. What endearing qualities can be demonstrated by simply developing a lifestyle of thanksgiving? Let's read from Luke 17:11-19.

*11 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." **Luke 17:11-19 (NIV)***

First, the most obvious admonition we can see in this passage is to:

**1. Be Thankful in Difficult Circumstances.**

Here you have ten men who are stricken with a hideous disease. Leprosy attacks the body causing sores, missing or damaged extremities, constant or intense pain, and then there is the smell of rotting flesh. Leprosy can take up to 30 years to run its course. It is a horrible disease today even with our modern advanced medical treatment.

But to really appreciate just how bad this disease was then, you have to understand more than just the leper's physical suffering. The emotional suffering was even worse. You see, the leper could have no contact whatsoever, with anyone – not even family. No one could stand to be around them because of the sight and the smell, but also, no one would dare even come close to a leper for fear that they too, would become afflicted.

The result was that lepers were forced to live together in colonies or by themselves. They were forced to beg for food and assistance, but even that had to be done from a great distance. Lepers had to learn to yell in loud voices, warning people that they were approaching or while begging for help. Such a lifestyle had to have been utterly horrible.

In this account, Dr. Luke tells us of ten lepers approaching Jesus, crying out, "*Jesus, Master, have pity on us.*" (13) and Jesus responds, "*Go show yourselves to the priest.*" (14).

Now let me pause here and tell you why Jesus said this. The local priest had duties other than leading worship on each Sabbath. He was also something of a health official. If a person was healed of leprosy, it was up to the priest to inspect the body for a complete removal of the disease, and to announce that the person was healed. In such cases, at that point, it would be OK for the leper to see their family again and to look for work. So this is why Jesus says to these ten men, "*Go show yourselves to the priest.*"

But notice this. Vs. 14b says, "...*as they went, they were cleansed.*" When these ten men left Jesus, they were not healed. If they were to look down at their bodies, the hands of one guy would have still been mangled. Another guy's leg would have still been bound with a filthy rag. Another man's skin would have still been as white and scaly and itchy as ever – and they all would have still stank to high heaven! In other words, every one of these men were no better off at this point than they had been ten minutes earlier, when they had first cried out to Jesus.

It wasn't until these lepers were on their way that they were healed. Can you imagine that scene? One man's hand suddenly reappearing - a filthy rag falling to the ground because another man's leg was restored to health - another guy's amazed look as he saw his skin clearing up before his very eyes? And can you picture them all screaming with delight as they all realized their physical nightmare was over? Can you hear them screaming in pure joy while running off in the distance?

It's hard for us to imagine because probably none of us have ever even seen a leper, much less one who was suffering in Jesus' day. But I want you to imagine in your minds' eye what these men were experiencing. And realize that in order for this miracle of healing to take place, these men had to start walking in faith before their circumstances had changed one bit.

On this Thanksgiving week, don't miss the lesson. We can't wait until our problems are over to step out in faith and follow Jesus. We can't pray "*Lord, if you'll take care of this problem, I'll start going to church.*" We can't say, "*Lord, as soon as there's enough money, I'll start tithing.*" We can't put conditions on God! Instead, God demands faith from us before anything changes.

You see, God deserves our love despite our disease. He deserves our obedience despite any lack of talent. He wants us to follow Him right now in spite of our depression. He says that we are to learn to praise Him even in the worst of circumstances.

This is the nature of God, a God who loves you so much, He'll give you the opportunity to be thankful when nothing about your circumstances motivates you to say "*Thank you.*" This is the very definition of faith. If you praise God only when things are going great, it would not be faith at all. That would be more like a business arrangement - and following Christ is not about business!

Some of you might in a horrible circumstance right now. And what you're going through today, is forcing you to decide if you're going to be thankful in spite the difficult circumstances. If you do, then you'll experience faith.

Once, I heard a youth evangelist relate his experience of going on a mission trip when he was a teenager. He'd gone with his church to one of the poorest section of Chicago to help a struggling church with VBS and other service projects. He said it was the first time he had seen first-hand what it really meant to be poor and have nothing. But during a worship service they had with the little church, called the Uptown Baptist Church, he heard something that changed his mind about the condition of those people. He said their little youth choir got up to sing – about 15 black teenagers with nothing on but worn-out jeans and tattered t-shirts – and with smiles on their faces and enthusiasm in their hearts, they began to sing, "*We've got so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, so much, to be thankful for.*" He said, "*There were those kids thanking God even though on the outside they had nothing, but on the inside, they had everything.*"

Secondly, we can see in this passage, that in living a lifestyle of thanksgiving we will:

## **2. Be Thankful Because of God's Goodness**

One of the men came back to Jesus, and praised God. He was publically and unashamedly thankful and loud about it. Why was he so loud? His disease had forced him to yell. In fact, he'd probably yelled so long, he

didn't know how to speak in a normal voice. When he fell at the feet of Jesus, he was just as loud as he had been, but this time, he was praising God.

The application here should also be obvious. Don't miss the opportunity to worship God this week. And it's ok to be loud about it! This week, take time to acknowledge God for His goodness. Be truly thankful. Don't just say a quick prayer before the meal on Thursday, but take time to be in a constant attitude of prayer because God is good all the time.

You see, your Thanksgiving week is probably like mine – cramming five days of work into three or less. But even your time off will be busy with honey-do chores, cooking, cleaning, shopping, traveling, etc. I mean, if you're going to get everything done this week, you should have started two weeks ago!

What I'm saying is, it's possible to go through Thanksgiving without ever stopping to be thankful! Don't do that! Commit to it, and do it. Also, living a lifestyle of thanksgiving means we will:

### **3. Be Thankful and Act on It**

In our story, only one of the lepers who had been healed came back to thank Jesus. This man was somehow able to catch himself, put his celebration on hold, and return to Jesus with a truly thankful heart. His thankfulness led to action.

Upon seeing this man's attitude of thanksgiving, Jesus asked him, "*Where are the other nine?*" (17). Now, nowhere in this discourse did Jesus ever tell any of these lepers to come back and thank Him, but you better believe it was expected that they would. Wouldn't you? I mean, if you did something so life-changing for someone as Jesus did, wouldn't you expect that they would at least say thank-you?

The point is, Jesus is always expecting something from His children. That is one reason God the Father gave us His Holy Spirit to be with us. His Holy Spirit is constantly urging us to action – tugging at us to step out in faith – prodding us to live out our faith in service to others. And that urging, tugging, and prodding goes on even during this Thanksgiving season. In fact, I've already heard of it and seen it taking place. Just this week I received a phone call from a member asking me if there was someone who needed help during this season. This is what our Lord expects of us – to keep our hearts sensitive to the needs of others, and then out of a thankful heart, act on it.

Is there something you feel compelled to do? My advice, based on what Jesus was looking for out of these lepers, is to take that step of action. Don't let Jesus have to ask about you - "*Where are all those others I have blessed? What are they doing for me? Are they not thankful?*" Act on your thankfulness. As my pastor used to say, "*Put legs on your prayers!*" If you are truly thankful, let it show not only in your words, but in your actions as well.

Finally, living a lifestyle of thanksgiving means that you can:

### **4. Be Thankful and be Made Whole**

In this passage, Luke uses three different words here that all try to say the same thing. They're all saying that this former leper was now well and whole.

Look first at verse 15. "*One of them, when he saw he was healed . . .*" and stop there. This Greek word is "*iaomai*," (*Hi-o-mi*) which is a medical term referring a physical treatment of repairing. Dr. Luke uses this word 15 times in his Gospel.

Then look at verse 17. Jesus asked, "*Were not all ten cleansed?*" Now this is a different word. This word is "*kath-a-ri-zo*," which is the root word for our English word "*catheter*." It's also a medical word but it means, "*purged, or purified in order to bring about healing*." When the lepers went to the priests, this cleansing was what they would be looking for.

Now, look at one more word. In verse 19, Jesus says to this thankful man, "*Rise and go; your faith has made you well.*"

"*Made you well . . .*" is not necessarily a medical word, although it could be used to describe the delivery of a baby. This is the word, "*sozo*," which means, "*protected, preserved, or saved*." The Greeks used this word to describe people who had escaped dangerous situations. When sailors survived a storm at sea and had been saved, they said "*sozo*." When Matthew wrote that the angel told Joseph to name the Christ child "*Jesus*," because that name meant that he would "*save people from their sins*." (1:21 NIV) He used the word "*sozo*."

When Paul described what would happen to a person who publicly professed Jesus as Lord and Savior, he used this same word, ". . . *If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God*

*raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (sozo). For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (sozo!) Romans 10:9-10 (NIV).*

And Jesus says to this thankful man who was willing to follow God even before his circumstances changed that he had been saved. He told this man who was thankful enough to worship God before he returned home that he was now made whole. He pronounced a complete healing upon this man because he understood what he had received. He was thankful even in his difficult circumstance. He was thankful because of God's goodness in healing his body. He was thankful and it turned to action. His thankfulness led him to be made whole which was a wellness that went beyond all the other terms of wellness.

**Conclusion:** I've tried to show you through Jesus' complete healing of this one thankful leper how to develop a lifestyle of thanksgiving. But more than that, I want us to understand more about the only one who can bring about complete healing.

In Matthew's gospel, there is another story of a leper's healing. In 8:1-4, we read that another leper approached Jesus and from a distance, knelt before Him and begged for help. No doubt, everyone in that large crowd who followed Jesus backed away gasping in fear of getting too close and held their noses. That is, everyone except Jesus. Matthew wrote that "*Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.*" Then He told him "*Be clean . . .*" (3).

Folks, this is the reason we can easily fall in love with Jesus. He loves us and is willing to touch us and make us whole, even though our sin is repulsive in His sight. He loves us, no matter who we are, where we've been, or what we've done.

This morning, you've touched more people in an hour than this leper had touched in years. Today, you've been close to friends or family. Maybe a child has sat in your lap. Maybe a friend has given you a hug or a handshake. This leper longed for those simple things, but no one was willing to risk giving him what he wanted most. No one except Jesus. Jesus was willing to give him that touch.

And today, Jesus is still willing to take a risk on you. You see, He will touch you no matter how badly you've been scarred. He's willing to love you no matter how much you might think your sin has made you unlovable. Jesus is willing to lovingly touch you, hold you, and restore you. He's willing to call you His friend, and stand beside you because it was His death that paid for your sin.

The miracle of Thanksgiving is the love Jesus has for you. And because of that love, He is asking you today to express your faith in Him by coming and bowing before Him, saying, "*Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.*" Do that, and I guarantee you that Jesus will touch you and make you whole. He'll save you to the uttermost, and then, you will have so much, so much, so much more to be thankful for.