

Giving Thanks

Luke 17:11—19

Introduction

Thanksgiving. What images does this word conjure up in your mind? Turkey? Pilgrims? Indians? Family? A day off work? Watching football? Sleeping in front of a football game with your belt undone? The Westminster Dog Show? The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade? The official beginning of the Christmas shopping season (although "Black Friday" now begins in October)? That could explain why we have this service tonight. Many of us, me included, have family plans tomorrow, whether out-of-town, or hosting at home. That might help us better understand our Gospel lesson, where Jesus heals the ten lepers.

Questions This Story Raises

It's safe to say that the parables of Jesus are often hard to understand, as they have different layers of meaning. But sometimes, even the events in His life leave us with a few questions. Three occurred to me.

Why didn't the other nine return?

The first is, "Why didn't the other nine return to thank Jesus like the one did?" I can think of two possible reasons. One is that maybe they just wanted to make sure they did what Jesus had told them to do. After all, in identifying the one who returned as a Samaritan, these other nine fellows must be Jews. Legalism, a strict Pharisaical following of the Law can get in the way of our being thankful. The second possible explanation is that they were just too caught up in their healing. Sometimes, we can focus on the gift instead of the Giver and forget to thank Him.

What's the significance of the one being a Samaritan?

As mentioned above, the one who returns to thank Jesus is a Samaritan. What's the significance of that? A Samaritan was not just a person from Samaria, a land north of Judah. The Samaritans were descendants of the ten northern tribes. When they were conquered by Assyria, they were dispersed and intermarried with other nationalities. So, their descendants were of mixed blood. Because of this, they were held in lower esteem than Gentiles. As in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, any time a Samaritan was the "good guy", it was totally unexpected. When we become too privileged, we tend to become less thankful. It seems like the more we have, the less thankful we are for what we do have.

Was the healing taken away from the others?

The last question is one of speculation, "what happened to the other nine?" We must remember, *as they went they were cleansed (v. 14)*. The leper wasn't healed when he returned, but when he left. Obedience to Jesus was the expression of faith. Thanksgiving was an act of love, caused by the grace of being healed. All ten lepers were cleansed, so they must have all had faith. And, as Paul says in **Romans 11:29**, *the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*. He will never take them away. Of course, we should not think that this means that once we are saved, we can never lose our salvation by the way we live.

A Takeaway

We would be hard-pressed to find people coming back to thank Jesus for healing them. Sometimes, they praise God. But many times, the story merely ends with their being healed. In **John 9**, when Jesus healed the man born blind, the man thanked Him after Jesus sought Him out. I think it's safe to assume that if Jesus had sought out these nine men, they would have thanked Him. The thing is, they just didn't make the effort. May we this Thanksgiving, and all our lives be thankful enough for all God has done for us to make the effort to give thanks and worship to Him.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
