



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 17:11-19
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Thanks a Lot!

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

There are a lot of things that I am grateful to the Lord for. Cathy and I have been married for 20 years and for the past 20 years we have enjoyed taking walks together a couple of times a week. It's our time to connect with each other. What I am so grateful for is where we have been able to take these walks. In those 20 years we have moved eleven times. Now, I hate moving but what moving has done is given us some wonderful places to take these walks. Early on we lived near the beach in southern California. Later we moved to Foster City with the levee. We then moved to the Black Forest in Germany. Now we live a few minutes from Coyote Point and the bay. Although moving has been stressful, I am grateful to the Lord for where He has allowed us to move.

Another story illustrating gratitude is that of Orel Herschiser and his 1998 pitching season for the Los Angeles Dodgers. In August he pitched a shutout game and pitched five more complete games through the end of the season. He didn't allow his opponents to score an earned run in 59 consecutive innings. The Dodgers faced the New York Mets in the play-offs and Orel led the Dodgers to victory by pitching more than 24 innings and crowned that with a complete game shutout in the final game. In the World Series, his complete game victory in game five over the Oakland A's clinched the series for the Dodgers. Orel was awarded the Cy Young award and two MVP awards, one for the play-offs and one for the World Series.

During the play-offs the TV cameras zoomed in on Orel in the dugout between innings and caught him singing softly to himself. The announcers just commented that he had a lot to sing about. When Orel appeared on *The Tonight Show* a few days later, Johnny Carson replayed the tape and asked him what song he had been singing and if Orel would sing it for them right then and there. The audience roared in approval and reluctantly an embarrassed Orel conceded. So on national TV, Orel softly sang: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below; Praise Him above all heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen." Now that's gratitude in action. Truth is, being grateful for what God has done for us and for who He is should result in some kind of a response of gratitude.

As Christians we have so much to be grateful to God for. Yet, I believe that most of the time we fall short of expressing that gratitude. I know I do. We get so caught up in our day to day stuff that we lose sight of His

goodness to us or we just begin to take it for granted. It is far easier to focus on our needs than all that we have and are blessed with, isn't it? I believe that this is one of the primary reasons the Christian culture in America is so weak and watered down and so many of us experience more anxiety and stress than joy and freedom. We focus on us. Especially when things are tough, it's hard to remember that God will continue to do things and be someone we can be grateful for. As we learn to live a life that is focused on expressing our gratitude to God, and less on how we can make our lives easier, we will experience more of what Jesus said when He said that He has come that we would experience not only life, but life to the fullest!

This morning as we continue our study in Luke, we are going to look at how to genuinely respond to the Lord in gratitude. We have a great example in today's passage – Luke 17:11-19.

"While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When He saw them, He said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine--where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.'"

In this passage, Jesus was headed to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The route he was taking was on the border of two provinces which would make it probable that the ten lepers who approached him were of various races and cultures, which is an important detail that will come up later in the passage. There was lots of ethnic tension in that day in that region, a lot of hatred for those living in a neighboring province. Some things don't change much.

Now we know that misery loves company and those with leprosy would surely band together. They were social and spiritual outcasts that were suffering intensely

so it's no wonder they banded together despite their ethnic backgrounds. Notice first that they observe the law by standing at a distance, yet it doesn't keep them from crying out to Jesus for help. I get this picture of crazed fans standing behind a barrier and guards as they scream at a movie or rock star. These guys aren't screaming in delight though. They are asking for mercy which means that they were calling out to Jesus to have compassion on them. To see how much they were suffering and do something about it.

Notice they call Him Master. It's the same word Jesus' disciples used when referring to Him. These ten guys knew that He was much more than a good teacher. They knew He could cure them. I'm sure that they had heard of his other miracles, especially the leper He had healed back in chapter 5.

So the first step in genuinely responding to God in gratitude is by first humbly recognizing our need for His mercy.

Notice these guys didn't flippantly come to Jesus and say, "Hey Jesus, we heard what you did to that guy with leprosy last week. How about doing the same for us? Please?" No. They begged for Jesus to look on their condition and have mercy on them. They also recognized that Jesus had the ability to heal them. We spend a lot of energy trying to make ourselves better people. We read self help books, tune in to Dr. Phil, even go to counseling which are all OK to a point. The problem is that we forget that only in Jesus lies the power to ultimately heal and bring restoration. He knows our innermost needs. We may not be lepers, but we are in constant need of His mercy.

I know that one of the fatal traps I fall into time and time again is experiencing God's forgiveness, grace and mercy in my life and then in no time, forgetting what was done for me and returning to that mindset or activity that got me to the place where I needed grace and mercy. I get cocky and self reliant. This really requires a regular mindset of a beggar begging for bread. Knowing his need for someone to come through and give him something to eat. How proud we are when it comes to admitting our needs and weaknesses. We work so hard to disguise our weaknesses with hard work, denial or avoiding difficult situations that are good for us that we no longer become accustomed to begging for God's mercy which we are all in such need for on a regular basis. We insulate ourselves.

Really, in order to be grateful to God for something, we need to be fully aware of how much has been done for us and how much we are still in need of God's mercy daily.

Now notice the way that Jesus heals these

guys. In verse 14 He just tells the men to go and show themselves to the priest and as they went they were healed. Back in 5:13 he touches a leprous man, tells him He is willing to heal him and says, "Be clean," and heals him. And we make a lot of how Jesus gave this man a huge gift not only in healing him but giving him his first physical touch by another human in possibly many years. And it is very significant. But here, Jesus doesn't even say, "Be clean" or "Be healed." He just says "Go."

Can't you just hear the conversations within their group as they turn to go and find the priest? "This is a weird request." "Isn't He supposed to touch us or at least say some healing words first?" "This isn't how He did it with the other guy last week." But they turn to go find the priest. Showing themselves to the priest was required by law. Once the priest pronounced them healed, they would be restored to full social and religious fellowship. So these guys do what Jesus asked them to do.

This brings us to the second way to genuinely respond to God in gratitude—be obedient.

I know that this is a word with lots of potential baggage. But in order to live a life that is marked by gratitude towards God, we need to constantly be learning how to be obedient children. One of the important things my father taught me as I was growing up was how to save money. As soon as I was old enough to work I got a job as a box boy at a grocery store. My father made me save most of my earnings, which didn't always sit well for a high school student that liked to buy music and eat out. I was grateful after graduation that he had made me do that because I was able to buy a sweet Camaro and add a killer stereo and other fine accessories. I am grateful to this day because my view of spending and saving money has been greatly shaped by obeying my father's wishes back in high school. But obedience doesn't always lead to a cool car!

I think of my own children. As they learn to be obedient to my wife and I, other authorities and to just do what is right, they will in turn be grateful for knowing how to conduct themselves in life in a way that will be the most beneficial. If I tell them, "Don't steal," and they live by that rule in every aspect, they will in turn be grateful for not having to face the consequences of being caught stealing or living with a guilty conscience or being a good example. As Christians, being obedient simply means living a life that God tells us to live, recognizing that He knows best.

When we are obedient to the key elements of the Christian faith like staying in the word, praying, being accountable and staying the course, we will become increasingly grateful for all that the Lord does in and through us. I think we let a lot of little things slide when it comes to being obedient and slowly we become sloppy and all it takes is for us to get a little off track in our thought life, attitudes and actions until we are no longer living a life of gratitude but of frustration and anxiety Notice in verses in verses 15 and 16 that as they went, obeying Jesus,

one turns back and does two very profound things. First, he loudly praises God. Can't you just see this guy? "Thank you God! Thank you God! And second, he throws himself at Jesus' feet and thanks Him.

So here you have it. The guy is coming back to Jesus, praising God out loud the whole way and then he hits the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him profusely. Don't you just get a picture of total wholehearted praise, thanks and gratitude?

Now what makes this even more astounding is that this guy is a foreigner, and an unlikely foreigner. Samaritans and Jews hated each other. Samaritans were a mixed race of Jews and pagans from back in Old Testament times. Since the Jews hated them, the Samaritans grew to hate them back. That's what makes this story even more wild. Remember, this was a mixed race of lepers. More than likely most of the ten were Jews. Yet the only one to return and show extreme gratitude to Jesus the Jew was a foreigner. Not only a foreigner, but one hated by Jews. Interesting.

So, the third way to genuinely respond to God in gratitude is to proclaim our gratitude whole heartedly.

I want to show you a movie clip from *Hook* of wholehearted gratitude. Peter is giving a speech at a reception for Grandma Wendy in recognition for her work with orphans over the years. Notice the people's faces as they express their gratitude. How do we practically proclaim our gratitude whole heartedly? There are many ways.

One way is in our worship, both corporate and private. In church do you just sing the songs or take advantage of the opportunity to express your gratitude to God? Do you ever get by yourself to just sing praises or tell God how grateful you are to Him? Another way to proclaim our gratitude whole heartedly is how we use our time. Is our schedule so full that we have no time to serve? Our time is one of the most precious commodities we have. So it seems to reason that it should be used to show God how grateful we are. This isn't a serving out of duty but out of gratitude. It's a mindset that says, "How can I not give of my time when so much has been given to me." Some examples are: Serving in the children's and youth ministries here at CPC or many other ministries here. Serving a neighbor or friend. Young Life. There are many ways to use our time to express our gratitude to God. How about with our money? I'm so sick of hearing how little money we Christians give to the church and other ministries. If giving of money is a measure of our gratitude to God for all He has done, how grateful are we, really?

Now in verses 17-19 we see Jesus' response to this man returning to Him. At first Jesus asks where the other nine are. You can really sense in Jesus' words that He is really disappointed in the response of the nine. "Didn't I heal ten people?" We might say, "Wait, He asked them to go show themselves to the priest. Didn't they obey Jesus' command?" I believe that what we see here is that

obedience is not enough. God expects us to be grateful people that express gratitude to Him. It's like He is saying to us that He wants us to not only obey His words but let Him know how grateful we are to Him for what He does and who He is. I have a feeling that the odds here, one in ten, are probably pretty accurate when it comes to how many of us truly express our gratitude to God. I know for me, those odds are probably accurate in how often I express my gratitude to Him. Once again this verse implies that many of the other lepers, if not all of the other nine may have been Jews by how Jesus makes mention of His amazement that "this foreigner" was the only one to return.

What does this say about us Christians? I think that the truth of the matter is that we get so absorbed in our desire to be whole or healthy or comfortable that we forget, or even ignore, who has so graciously given us that wholeness, health or comfort. I love the excitement of a new believer as he or she is experiencing God's goodness for the first time. They are so expressive about their gratitude. They are that way because they are proving that often those that are most grateful are those that least expect His goodness. It's not old. Is God's goodness getting routine or are we just inoculated by it? Are we so comfortable that we forget what it's like to receive healing, grace and mercy from Him?

Philip Yancey says, "I remember my first visit to Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park. Rings of Japanese and German tourists surrounded the geyser, their video cameras trained like weapons on the famous hole in the ground. A large, digital clock stood beside the spot, predicting 24 minutes until the next eruption. My wife and I passed the countdown in the dining room of Old Faithful Inn overlooking the geyser. When the digital clock reached one minute, we, along with every other diner, left our seats and rushed to the windows to see the big, wet event. I noticed that immediately, as if on signal, a crew of busboys and waiters descended on the tables to refill water glasses and clear away dirty dishes. When the geyser went off, we tourists oohed and aahed and clicked our cameras; a few spontaneously applauded. But, glancing back over my shoulder, I saw that not a single waiter or busboy – not even those who had finished their chores – looked out the huge windows. Old Faithful, grown entirely too familiar, had lost its power to impress them."

I think fewer things are taken for granted more quickly than God's faithfulness. But few things are more important. Notice what Jesus tells the healed man. "Your faith has made you well." What does that mean? Wasn't he cured before he returned to Jesus? Yes, he was cured. But what "well" means here is saved. Jesus is telling him that the expression of his faith in recognizing who Jesus is and giving Him glory and

honor has given him much more than a physical healing. His soul had been touched. He has received the healing of a broken relationship between he and God and that is what he needed far more than a cure from leprosy.

It's the same as with the woman in Luke 7 that the Bible said had lived an immoral life, yet comes to Jesus while He is eating dinner at a Pharisee's house. She begins crying and her tears fall on Jesus' feet and she wipes them with her hair and kisses his feet and pours perfume on them. Jesus tells her that her faith in Him, her faith displayed in heartfelt gratitude, has saved her and made her clean and forgiven. That is the message of the Bible and of Christianity. God desires to touch our inner being, to mend that broken relationship between man and God, and only by receiving by faith what God has done for us can we enter into that relationship. It's not by our getting our act together. It's much more than making it through this life or a tough time. It's coming to grips with the incredible truth that Jesus promised us when He said, "I have come to give you life to the full!"

The fourth way to genuinely respond to God in gratitude is continually come to Him in faith.

Remember last week's message where having faith as small as a mustard seed could uproot a mulberry tree and plant it into the ocean? I don't know about you, but I have never been one to think that I am strong in the area of faith. What I learned from last week's sermon and from Jesus' response to this one guy is that true faith doesn't mean having it all worked out. Faith is demonstrated as we come to God, broken and weak and in need of His deep healing. Acknowledging that He alone is healer. Yet also coming with a grateful heart for what He has done and will continue to do in and through me. That is what makes us well. As Christians we are all lepers that are healed and enjoy countless blessings. Yet we are among the nine when we fail to recognize it. You've heard the phrase, "I can't thank you enough."_Think about what that really means in how we are to respond to God in gratitude. We can't thank Him enough! So is the answer to try and stay in this constant state of gratitude, thanking Him constantly for what He has done for us, given to us and provided for us? YES!

The bottom line is that all of these points that we have looked at here are to be ongoing, continual, a constant frame of mind. I've been challenged in preparing for this to constantly remind myself throughout the day to express my gratitude to God. Even when my circumstances don't seem to lead to that and that's not easy. But I am learning that the more grateful I am, the more content I am because my focus is right.