



- Rescued by Steve Tyser
- Stranded in the snow on a rafting trip
- We were destitute, desperate, and just about as humbled as we could be.
- I have never been more sincerely thankful for a ride than I was that day.

-- **Big Idea:** True thanksgiving is born of humility.

-- Read Luke 17:11-17

-- Pray

Well, now that Thanksgiving Day has passed, I want to get your opinion about a small but significant change that I would like to make for future Thanksgiving seasons, which is this: I think we should change the traditional Thanksgiving from, “Have a happy Thanksgiving” to “Have a humble Thanksgiving!” For as blessed as it is to be happy about Thanksgiving, I believe we will be even more blessed—and more happy—if we remember to have a humble holiday, because, as I said before, true Thanksgiving is born of humility.

As we examine that main idea this morning, I think our text shows us at least three reasons why true thanksgiving is born of humility, and the first reason is this:

1.) Destitution draws us together.

-- Lord of the Rings – Clip 1 – Fellowship of the Nine

-- Although the nine characters in the film were so very different and disagreeable, their situation was so desperate that they were forced to come together.

-- We see something very similar happening in our text today.

Please look with me verse 11, and notice there that Jesus is traveling on the border between the predominantly Jewish region of Galilee and the region of

Samaria, which was home to one of Israel's most bitter enemies—the Samaritans. Thus, these verses find Jesus actually walking the line between two cultures that hated each other with a passion.

Then as we come to verses 12-13, we discover that, while Jesus was walking that precarious geographical line, he was accosted by ten lepers who stood at a distance and cried out to Him saying, “*Jesus, Master, have pity on us!*” And as we consider this group of lepers this morning, we are blessed to notice something very remarkable about them, which is this: The bitter hatred that marks the very border upon which Jesus is traveling seems to find no place among them.

You see, in verse 16, we learn that at least one of these ten men—namely the one who returns to thank Jesus—is actually a Samaritan. Therefore, what is clearly implied by the fact that Jesus mentions his nationality is the fact that these lepers were a mixed group of both Samaritans and Jews. And yet, in spite of their differences, there they all were, crying out to Him in one common voice for one common purpose, and the horrible hostility that so ferociously festered between the so-called “healthy” Jews and Samaritans is somehow missing within this group of sick souls.

This dynamic, then, raises an important question for us to consider. Why was the deeply rooted cultural acrimony between Jews and Samaritans overcome among these men, even while it remained so fierce in the culture at large? That is to say, how were these ten Samaritans and Jews able to join together as one for one common purpose, when most of the other Jews and Samaritans around them couldn't even tolerate the sight of each other?

Well, while some questions from Scripture can be quite difficult to answer, this one is not. Why were these traditional enemies drawn together? Well, it certainly wasn't because of some government-sponsored program, nor did it have anything to do with sensitivity training or multitudes of multicultural meetings. No, they were drawn together because they were desperate. These men had much bigger problems than the petty human rivalry that existed between Jews and Samaritans. They were defiled, they were despised, and they were dying.

And in the face of these monumental problems, the minor differences that divided everyone else were simply irrelevant. In light of their common, debilitating, and ostracizing disease, the racism they were supposed to feel simply disappeared. In their common destitution, they found a compelling common bond.

And because of their common need, they had all come together to pursue a common hope. They came to be healed by Jesus.

Listen: You and I ought to understand today that our condition is really no different than theirs. You see, the feud between the Jews and the Samaritans were born of a terrible misunderstanding of basic human nature, in which certain people viewed themselves to be inherently superior to others. Indeed, this is the root of racism in general, isn't it? The truth of the matter, however, is that no of us are good. In Romans 3:10-12, Paul quotes the 53rd Psalm and urges us to understand that, "*There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.*" The best way to end racism is to show every man a sinner.

All of us, you see, are afflicted. We all suffer from the same destitution because the curse of sin has afflicted us all. Whether we like it or not, we are similar to the men in our text because we are all bound together by one common problem. They were all lepers; we are all sinners. And like these lepers, those of us who really understand our destitution should be drawn together by it. In the light of our destitution, shouldn't we cast aside every petty disagreement and come together for one common purpose. Shouldn't we join forces to call out to the Lord for healing and praise His name with thanksgiving for the pardon He has purchased for you and for me? The point here is this: The better we understand our common destitution, the more thankful you and I will be for the people who are seated together with us right now.

Let me ask you: Are you truly thankful to be a part of this church family today? If not, let me ask you this: How seriously have you grappled with the destitution brought on by sin? Because the more clearly we see our sickness, the more closely we will be drawn to other believers, *because true thanksgiving is born of a humility that understands our need for Christ and thanks Him that He has joined us together with others who see it as well.* Therefore, this Thanksgiving, let us humbly thank God for one another and the privilege we have to join together to pursue the hope that we have in Jesus Christ alone.

The second reason why true Thanksgiving is born of humility is that...

2.) Desperation desires a Savior.

-- Desperately seeking a phone when stranded on that rafting trip

The first thing we see in this verse is that these ten lepers “*stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice,*” and they didn’t do so because they were afraid of Jesus or because they were trying to be polite or even because they really wanted to. No, they stood at a distance from Jesus—and from everyone else for that matter—because they were required by law to do so. In fact, Lepers were so ostracized from society that they were required by the law to stand at least fifty yards away when a healthy person stood downwind. Truly, few people in that day, if any at all, lived a more severely separated life than lepers.

And just as leprosy separated people from *society*, so too, sin has separated all people from *God*. Listen to how Paul characterizes the universal human condition apart from Christ in Ephesians 2:1-3:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live... All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

A more desperate condition than that is surely impossible to imagine. What could possibly be more dreadful than to be dead in sins and objects of God’s wrath? And, yet, that terrible condition was true of you and me, and it remains the condition of everyone who does not confess Jesus Christ as Lord. The ten lepers in our text desperately desired a Savior because their disease had separated them from society. How much more, then, should we call out to Christ, since the disease of sin has separated us from the one and only God of the universe?

Moreover, in that day, the only conceivable cure for leprosy would have been the direct intervention of God. Thus, as these ten lepers cried out to Christ, they cried out unto Him as their only hope. Only He could heal them and restore them to the fellowship of the community. In the same way, Jesus Christ is our only hope. No one and nothing else could ever restore us to fellowship with God. Acts 4:12 makes this point very clear, saying, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*”

Through Jesus Christ, God has mercifully met our desperate need. And the extent to which we humbly understand our desperation is the extent to which we will be sincerely thankful people. You see, thanksgiving, in its best and barest form is not about circumstances, but about salvation. It is not so much about the things we have been given, but about the fact that we are forgiven. It is not so much about what we have as it is about who God is.

In light of our desperation, how can we fail to shower thanksgiving upon Him who by His mercy heals us? True thanksgiving is born of humility because desperation desires a Savior.

Finally, true thanksgiving is born of humility because...

3.) Depravity demands grace.

The surgeon of a regiment in India relates the following incident:

“A soldier rushed into the tent to inform me that one of his comrades was drowning in a pond, and nobody could save him because of the dense woods which covered the surface. We found the poor fellow manfully attempting to extricate himself from the meshes of rope-like grass that encircled his body. But the more he labored to escape, the more firmly they became coiled around his limbs. At last the floating plants closed in and left no trace of the disaster. After some delay, a raft was made and we put off to the spot. A native dived, holding on by a stake, and brought the body to the surface. I shall never forget the expression on the dead man's face—the clenched teeth and fearful distortion of the countenance, while coils of long trailing weeds clung to his body and limbs, the muscles of which stood out stiff and rigid, while his hands grasped thick masses, showing how bravely he had struggled for life.”

This heart-rending picture is a dreadfully accurate picture of those who endeavor to work our way into heaven, for the more we struggle to earn that which cannot be earned, the more completely we will become entangled in the hopelessness of salvation by works. Eventually—and inevitably—we will drown in the depth of the sin from which we simply possess no power to rescue ourselves. In spite of anyone's best efforts, the grace that God expressed in Jesus Christ remains the only rescue from the suffocating grip of sin. And the humility that gives birth to true thanksgiving is rooted in an understanding of this truth more than anything else. And that very humility is what we see revealed in verses 15-19.

These verses are the part of this story that most of us probably know best, because in them we read about the one and only leper who actually returned to Jesus to thank him. And that is exactly what we would expect, isn't it. I mean, we have all grown up with moms who tirelessly trained us to say, “Thank you!” whenever anyone helped us, and certainly that ethic would have been appropriate

for these lepers in this scenario. However, hear this: As a general rule, if the message of Jesus' teaching seems to be exactly what His hearers would have expected, then we should probably stop and take a closer look, because Jesus was not in the habit of telling His hearers what they expected to hear.

For example, consider the unexpected messages that Jesus teaches in the passages that directly precede our text for this morning. In chapter 14, the rich are excluded from the great banquet and the poor are invited. In chapter 15, the ostensibly faithful son is corrected and the prodigal son is celebrated. In chapter 16, a dishonest manager is commended and a rich man in hell grovels to a poor named Lazarus who is seated in heaven.

Similarly, let me suggest to you that the main point of this encounter with these ten lepers was once again not what Jesus' hearers would have expected to hear. Listen to what well-respected New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg says about this text:

“People did not necessarily say ‘thank you’ in the ancient world; they just returned the favor. In fact, thanking people could imply that one was not going to do anything more and hence would end the relationship of mutual give-and-take. Thus, the Samaritan leper of Luke 17:11-19 who returns to give thanks to Jesus was perhaps not the man people would have expected Jesus to praise. Christ, however, was trying to teach that God’s grace is given without the possibility of repayment.”

You see, if we come to this text with our modern perspective of what it means to say “Thank you,” then this one leper’s encounter with Jesus makes perfect sense. We would, in that case, praise him because he would appear to be the only one thankful enough to come back and express his gratitude, just like his mommy taught him. However, as Blomberg demonstrates, saying “Thank you” in that day was viewed quite a bit differently than it is today. Doing so didn’t mean, “I appreciate it” as much as it meant, “I can’t pay you back.” Therefore, there is a very real sense in which the thankful leper would have been seen by Jesus’ hearers as the one who was taking the easy way out.

Also in support of this interpretation is that fact that it really makes no sense to suggest that *none* of the other nine lepers who were healed were thankful enough at least to come over to Jesus and say, “Hey, thanks.” These men had just been instantly and miraculously cured from an incurable affliction that had rendered all of them despised social outcasts. In light of that, it seems preposterous to suggest

that they ran off because they were unthankful. No, they didn't leave because they had no gratitude; they left because they wanted to repay the kindness. They scurried on to show themselves to the priest, just as Jesus had told them to do. They ran off because they were determined to try and earn the great gift that they had been given.

Therefore, I suggest to you that the tenth leper was not commended because he was more polite, or even because he was more thankful. Rather, the tenth leper was commended because he understood that he could not possibly earn the gift he had been given. He is acclaimed by Jesus because he knew that his salvation from leprosy was a gift that he could not repay. He was praised because he alone recognized that his depravity demanded God's grace, not his own good deeds.

In the same way, the depravity that has been brought on by our sin is a debt far too big for us ever to pay. Our separation from God will simply never be bridged by our good deeds. But praise be to God that, unlike the other nine lepers, we do not have to run out and try to earn the salvation we have received in Christ. Rather, like the one, we need only say "Thank you," because, as Ephesians 2:8-9 declares, "*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.*"

And, oh, what thanks are due to God, for He has graciously given us all that we need and an eternity of blessings beyond that. Whereas the prideful are bound to drown in the ungrateful mire of those who try to merit what cannot be earned, we come humbly to Christ and say "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

True thanksgiving, then, is born of humility because our destitution draws us together, our desperation desires a Savior, and our depravity demands the very grace that Jesus Christ died to provide. Do we want to be truly thankful people this and every Thanksgiving season? Let us, then, humble ourselves before Him and say "Thank you!"