

# It is right to give thanks and praise

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading this morning is from Luke's Gospel and we are reading from Luke's Gospel chapter 17 beginning at verse 11 and reading to the end of verse 19.

Luke's Gospel chapter 17 verse 11 to verse 19. Now on his way to Jerusalem Jesus travelled through the border between Samaria and Galilee.

As he was going into a village ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, Jesus, Master, have pity on us.

When he saw them he said, Go, show yourselves to the priests. And as they went they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, Were not all ten cleansed?

[ 1 : 05 ] Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Then he said to him, Rise and go.

Your faith has made you well. Amen. So we're now looking at Luke 17 starting at verse 11. Do you have that open?

If you can, let me ask you folks. Let me ask you, how would you like a lifetime of social distancing? Maybe you fancy living your whole life in quarantine. Tempting?

Not just a couple of weeks isolated in a hotel. Not just, you know, like if you're coming back from abroad now. Not just months or even a year of being two metres apart from others like we're currently enduring together.

Imagine all of that, but imagine that for a whole lifetime. And without the advantage of being with your household. No, you've got to leave your family behind. You've got to go and live in separation.

[ 2 : 01 ] Not fit for human society. Not suitable for the company of others. Without any end in sight. Not in June. None at all. Folks, this was the situation of the leper in Old Testament times and down into Jesus' day.

This is their reality. Separated from their own families. Unable to live inside the town. The ten men, in verse 12, they've banded together as best they can.

They can't approach anyone else. So here they are with one another. Often their families would come and provide them with food. But they'd have to do so at a distance. You leave the food somewhere safe and then later it can be retrieved.

Leviticus 13 and 14. It sets out the rules for these situations. When they are to be enacted and what's expected. And the rules for bringing that to a close as well.

And it's into this miserable situation. Here comes Jesus. Verse 11. He's still on his journey down to Jerusalem. And as he makes his way along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

[ 3 : 07 ] As he makes his way along, he turns aside. Presumably to rest for the night. Verse 12. He's going into a village. And as he goes in, these ten men see him. Can you imagine their excitement?

Clearly these ten lepers, they've heard reports about Jesus, haven't they? They clearly have some kind of expectation that he is a great man. Verse 13. They address him as master. They ask him for mercy.

Exactly what form they want that mercy to take isn't specified. Maybe they're just looking for some food. Maybe they hope. Maybe they hope. My suspicion is.

My suspicion is they've heard reports of a previous occasion. An occasion recorded back in Luke 5. In Luke 5, a man covered with leprosy came and fell before Jesus.

Begging to be made clean. And he was. It seems to me that's what this fresh group of lepers is hoping for, isn't it? When they ask for pity. When they ask for mercy. They're asking to be made

clean, aren't they?

[ 4 : 08 ] What else could be their biggest need? Not only is this disease debilitating in itself. Well, so too is the social impact. And in being cleansed.

In being cleansed, they'll be restored to society. Restored to their families. They want to be made clean. And they are. Verse 14. As they went, they were cleansed.

Now here's an interesting thing though. These lepers weren't cleansed immediately, were they? To the previous leper, back in Luke 5, Jesus said, I am willing, be clean. To these lepers, he says, go. Show yourselves to the priests. I mean, the implication is the same, right? Why show yourself to the priest? Well, that's the requirement from Leviticus. Cleansing from leprosy, that's to be assessed by the priest.

And sacrifices offered in response. You are not officially, formally clean until the priest says so. So there is an implication in the command to go and show themselves to the priest.

[ 5 : 14 ] There's an implication of cleansing. But you see, in this case, the cleansing does not happen until these lepers go and act as if it already has.

It's only as they went that they're cleansed. Friends, do you see the faith in action here? These lepers, they're willing to do as they're commanded.

They're willing to go and show themselves to the priests as though they were cleansed, before they can actually see themselves that they are cleansed. They demonstrate their faith.

And surely, surely there is something commendable for us here in this. Isn't there? Jesus' command is perfectly clear to these men.

Go, show yourselves to the priests. It might not make much sense to them. They might well be wondering, well, why should I do this? Why would I go and show myself to the priest?

[ 6 : 14 ] I'm still covered in leprosy. They might well feel quite uncertain. And yet, still in their uncertainty, their response is the only proper one, isn't it?

If you want a summary for my first point this morning, it's this. Faith means action. It isn't these men's place to question. It isn't their role to second guess, to ask, is this really the right thing to do? Did you really mean that, Jesus? See, going to the priest is what you do after you're clean, Jesus. I'm not sure if you've quite understood how this works. Do you understand the system here, Jesus? No, no. Wouldn't have been becoming, would it, for them to stand still and to reason it out, to doubt Jesus' command. It would not have been becoming for them.

And it is not becoming of us, either. When Jesus' instructions are clear, when God's commands are plain, our task is to get on with it.

[ 7 : 19 ] And frankly, that's our task, whether we like it or not. Faith means action. Faith means we do as we're commanded.

Now, maybe for some of us this morning, maybe for some of you, some of God's commands are baffling to you. Maybe you don't understand why God would say some of the things that he says, why he would expect some of the things that he does.

Maybe you look at some and say, God, do you really think that's a good idea? Yeah. Maybe you even think that of some of the commands earlier in this chapter that we've looked at over the last couple of weeks.

Is it really a good idea, God, for me to forgive someone seven times in one day? I mean, if I do that, doesn't that just cheapen grace?

Doesn't that remove an incentive to do better next time? If they know I'm just going to forgive them again and again and again. God, have you really thought this through? Now, friends, there is a time and a place to have those kinds of conversations.

[ 8 : 27 ] There is a reasonable, it is reasonable to try and think things through, to reason it out, to figure out what's going on.

It's not wrong to want to know the why of the commands. But still alongside that, we also have to say, when you're actually in the situation, in the heat of the moment where somebody comes and asks for forgiveness, that isn't the time to try and reason it out.

To say, well, hold on a minute. I just need to think through whether it's actually best to forgive you or not. Now, in that moment, obedience is what is expected of you.

When you're in the situation, the correct course is to obey, whether you understand or not. Friends, faith means action. Faith in Jesus means you do what he says.

Maybe these lepers, they might well have feared they were going to look foolish. To go to the priest and to say to him, I am clean, when actually they aren't yet as they set off.

[ 9 : 40 ] I mean, maybe it's just a case of that they're desperate enough to try any approach. I don't think it is, though. I think their willingness to obey overcomes their fear of looking foolish.

I think in their obedience, we see in a model for our own. We see here, don't we see, we see an example of the fact that God's ways are best.

We see an example of that, that even if we don't always see how they are best, yet they are. I'm sure to many of us, Romans 8, 28 is a familiar verse.

And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. We know this verse, don't we? We can, on the basis of Romans chapter 8, be absolutely confident that that which God commands is for our good.

And that means that whether we understand why it's good or not, we need not hesitate to obey, because we can be confident that it is.

[ 10 : 47 ] Let's follow the example of the lepers in this respect. Faith means action. So far, so good.

So far, so far this is an account of Jesus' miracles, not particularly dissimilar to any other miraculous account, right? We've seen Jesus heal lepers before.

We've seen Jesus heal kind of at a distance on other occasions. We've seen him expect people to act in faith before, not least the faith that brings them to him in the first place. I mean, think of the friends lowering their friends down through the paralyzed man, down through the roof.

Think of the woman who just wanted to touch Jesus' clothes. We've seen him expect faith. I mean, don't get me wrong, this isn't ordinary in the grand scheme of things, but in the course of Jesus' life, in the context of Jesus' other miraculous deeds, it's not, so far, that unusual.

And so we have to ask, what does this particular account add? Why does Luke include this? And why does he include it here? And I think the answer to those questions comes in the second half of the account.

[ 12 : 02 ] I think that this account is included here at this particular point, so that the gratitude of the one leper stands in contrast, in contrast not only to the response of his compatriots, the other nine lepers who don't come back to say thank you, but also stands against the background of that entitled attitude that we were thinking about last week in verses 7 to 10.

And that brings us to the second point, which is also the sermon title. It is right to give thanks and praise. Maybe to some of you, that phrase isn't quite as familiar to you as it is to me.

It's in my head from the Church of England Communion Liturgy. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give thanks and praise. It is indeed right. It is our duty and our joy at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise.

Holy Father, Heavenly King, Almighty and Eternal God, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Friends, that's what this account teaches us, isn't it? We see here in these verses, we see the importance, we see the rightness of giving thanks to God.

This one leper is held up as an example, in contrast against the other nine. See, verse 14, all of them were cleansed. Verse 15, one of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

[ 13 : 25 ] He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Now, there is an extent to which the behaviour of the nine is really quite understandable.

I mean, do you remember the circumstances? Remember the isolation. Remember the lack of social contact. Remember that the path to changing that lies through showing themselves to the priest.

That's the critical path. That's the thing. That's the gateway into fullness of life, isn't it? Show yourself to the priest and you are restored.

It's natural that they want to do that as quickly as possible. It's understandable that they don't want to be swayed from that course. It's understandable, but it's also wrong.

It's unacceptable. Verse 17, Jesus asks, where are the other nine? And when we pause for a moment, when we step back, this is what we expect, isn't it?

[ 14 : 28 ] This is reasonable to suppose that actually they would delay for a couple of hours. That major step and yet a couple of hours.

If you delay, will Jesus still be there for you to come and give thanks to him in a week's time? No, we won't. Now is the moment. It's unacceptable to ignore what he has done.

This is what we expect. This is what we teach our children, isn't it? We say please. We say thank you. We say sorry. When somebody does something for us, we thank them for it. It's appropriate behavior when somebody passes the salt.

It's appropriate behavior when somebody gives you a gift. It's appropriate when somebody goes out of their way to help you. It is right to give thanks and praise. And then verse 19, verse 19 further differentiates this one leper from the other nine.

Jesus said to him, Rise and go. Your faith has made you well. Now, here in verse 19, maybe it's not immediately apparent the differentiation that's being made because Jesus just affirms what we already know.

[15:40] The man has been healed. He's been made well. Well, maybe. This is one of those times where we have to acknowledge that translation from one language to another is tricky.

The word that's being translated here, made well. It absolutely can and does refer to healing, to physical well-being. But it also absolutely can and does mean more than that on at least some occasions.

It can also refer to spiritual well-being. It can refer to salvation. So, for instance, way back in Luke chapter 7. Actually, this is the account that we were talking about in the children's story last week. Do you remember the woman who came and poured the perfume on Jesus' feet? Well, the last thing Jesus said to that woman was, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Your faith has saved you.

Now, there, there, this same word clearly has to be translated saved because we don't have any indication that this woman had any kind of physical ailment.

[16:48] But it's this same word here in Luke 17. In fact, it's the same whole phrase. Your faith has made you well. Your faith has saved you. This is not the same word as the cleansing in verse 14 or the healing in verse 15.

No, verse 19 has this different word. And when you pull these elements together, the fact that it's a different word to earlier in the verse, the fact that it's the same phrase as he said to this woman, the fact that it's an entirely ordinary meaning of the Greek word that Luke wrote down.

When you pull these things together, I think we can say that Jesus is referring to salvation in the fullest sense. But this is the same word, the same idea as in John 3:17.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.

You see the saving of the world there, verse 17. This is the same word. So I think, I think here in Luke 17, Jesus is saying to this leper that he has received eternal life.

[18:05] Why? Why has this leper received eternal life but the other nine presumably have not? Yes, they've been healed but the use of verse 19, those are singular use.

Whatever Jesus says here in verse 19, he says it of this one, not of the many. What's the difference between this man and the others? He came back, praising God and thanking Jesus.

The difference is simple, isn't it? Not, of course, that this man is saved because of his thankfulness but that his thankfulness shows his faith.

It shows that he recognises Jesus not only as master, verse 13, not only as a healer but his thankfulness shows that he recognises Jesus as saviour, as Lord, even perhaps as God.

If that's what that leper's actions show, then we have to ask ourselves, don't we? We have to ask, what do our actions show of the state of our hearts?

[19:07] The mouth speaks what the heart is full of. So, so does your speech show that your heart is full of thankfulness? Are you daily thankful to God?

If this one leper was willing to delay his return to normal life, if he was willing to stay in quarantine longer in order to take the time to be thankful to Jesus for his healing, shouldn't we be that much more thankful for what Christ has done for us?

I mean, when we stop to think, there is so much for us to be thankful for, isn't there? Sometimes we get caught up in the things that aren't the way we want them to be. But there is so much to be thankful for.

From the daily practical provision that he makes for our knees through to salvation unto eternal life. And how readily we take all of these things for granted. How much we focus on the things that aren't the way we want them to be instead of all the things that have been perfectly arranged

exactly as we need them to be.

How much time do we spend in prayer asking God for what we do not have compared to how much time we spend thanking him for what we do have? Thankfulness is not a small thing, is it?

[ 20 : 28 ] It's a serious issue. Here's Romans chapter 1, verse 21. Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him.

But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Do you see the problem? The people that Paul's talking about are not atheists per se. They believe God exists. Verse 21, they knew him in some sense.

The problem is they didn't glorify him as God. The problem is they didn't give thanks to him. They thanked these mute idols instead of the living God.

We thank our own hands instead of the living God. This is what we might call practical atheism, isn't it?

[ 21 : 26 ] A failure to thank God is a failure to live as though God truly exists and is worthy of praise. So R.C. Sproul wonders, if I were to ask you what is your most base sin?

Your worst action of evil? Would you come up with something like failure to be grateful to God? Probably not. But according to Scripture that is our fundamental problem.

We think God owes us everything we receive and much more. We think we're entitled. Why give thanks for that which you are owed?

See, see, rebellion against God doesn't always manifest as a sort of clenched fist shaken in anger against God. Rebellion isn't always a decided, deliberate, conscious atheism.

It's not always refusing to believe that he exists at all. It's more often more subtle, more ordinary. It's like these other nine lepers.

[ 22 : 30 ] It's often simple ingratitude, failure to glorify God as he deserves. Paul's command, Ephesians 5, is to be those who are always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the ingratitude of those nine ex-lepers, we see in their attitude, we see mirrored and condemned the ingratitude of us all as we fail to thank God always and for everything.

We know it in theory, don't we? We know. We know that every mouthful of food, every lungful of air, we know that every good thing in the world around us is a good gift from God's abundant generosity.

We know it, but we don't act like it. Count your blessings. Name them one by one. Suppose, suppose one week you receive from the doctor a cancer diagnosis.

A one-month life expectancy. You return for a check-up next week and hear news of a miraculous new treatment that is all but guaranteed to cure you.

[ 23 : 49 ] In that situation, would you not be profoundly grateful to the researchers who'd made that discovery? Wouldn't you go out of your way to track them down and to express your thanks?

Well, my friends, the good news of the gospel is better news than that. If you are in Christ, your salvation is more certain than that amazing new treatment.

The fate from which you've been saved is worse than the most painful death. The future that lies before you is infinitely better than a continuation of your present life.

How could we not overflow with thankfulness to the author of our salvation? Let's thank him together now.

Lord God, our Father, we are sorry that we do not respond to you as we ought, that our faith is not lived out in practice, and that our thankfulness is absent, perfunctory, entirely lacking.

[ 24 : 57 ] We're sorry for these things and we resolve this morning, we resolve to recognize what you are due, to seek each day, to render to you some small fraction of the thanks that you are due.

As we see again what you have done for us. Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you were willing to pay that price for our salvation.

Thank you that you were willing to go to such painful lengths in order that we might be found rejoicing in you. Thank you, Lord.

Amen.