

A Thankful Heart

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- [0:00] Well, how about I pray for us and then we'll get into God's word together. Let's pray. Dear God, thank you so much for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you have not left us to wonder about who you are or how we got here or what we're meant to be doing in life.
- But that you have spoken to us through your son, the living word, and recorded for us the Bible, your scripture word.
- And so far, we pray that you would help us to understand what you are saying to us today, that we would live in light of it. And we ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Well, it's only four weeks to go until my daughter's dance concert.
- Yay. And they've told me that I need to do better this year than I did last year. You see, last year I attended their concert as a dutiful dad. I even sat in the second row to show how sincerely interested I was.
- And afterwards, they asked me whether I enjoyed the concert and to which I replied as sincerely as possible, of course, it's my favorite night of the year. To which they replied, well, why then did you fall asleep?
- [1:15] And being in the second row meant that they could see me and they saw that I had my head down. Now, for the record, I was not asleep. I was checking emails. But in my defense, they weren't actually on the stage at that moment when I started checking.
- But the point is, I could say as sincerely as I like that I love watching them dance. But my actions indicated that my interest was not sincere, but rather superficial.
- And so this year, I vow that I will make sure I sit further back. No, no, I will make sure I watch every dance of theirs with sincere and not superficial interest.
- Today is Thanksgiving Sunday. And as we'll see from our passage, actions which include genuine Thanksgiving, as Simon said at the start, are really a litmus test for whether our faith is sincere or superficial.
- But first, let me give you some context to this episode in Luke's gospel, because we're just kind of dropping in in the middle of it, really. So if you've got your Bibles there, from chapter 16, back a page, Jesus has been addressing his disciples about what it means to be a sincere disciple or person of God, unlike the Pharisees who were superficial.
- [2:43] So you can see just the first verse of chapter 16, Jesus told his disciples dot, dot, dot. And what he has to say here in chapter 16, essentially, has to do with money, about them not serving money, but using money for eternal purposes.
- So just have a look across at verse 9. On the next page, verse 9, top left-hand corner, he says, I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself, so that when it is gone, you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings.
- He's talking about using wealth to make Christians, essentially. Or verse 13, a bit further down, No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money. There's nothing wrong with money, but it's the love of money. It's serving it that Jesus warns them against. However, the Pharisees pop up, and they object because they love money.

Do you see verse 14? The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. And he said to them, You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts.

[3:57] What people value highly is detestable in God's sight. And so then Jesus addresses them, the Pharisees, and their superficial hearts with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

The rich man loved money more than God, and he actually ended up in hell, stuck there, as the story goes. And then chapter 17, verse 1, Jesus returns to teaching his disciples.

This is the context. And here he says, in chapter 17, 1 to 4, he says, Look, don't cause people to stumble. Then over the page in verse 3 and 4, he says, Forgive people when they sin against you.

So don't cause them to stumble and forgive. But in verse 5, it seems too hard for the apostles or the disciples. And so they said to Jesus, actually command Jesus, Increase our faith.

But in verse 6, Jesus says, It's not about the quantity of your faith. It's about the quality of your faith, whether it's sincere or superficial.

[4:58] If it is sincere, then it can do the impossible, and not literally uproot a plant, but something just as impossible, like living forever, getting eternal life. And a sincere faith, in verses 7 to 10, will not demand thanks from the master, but will acknowledge their unworthiness and serve the master.

Do you see verse 9? Will he, the master, thank the servants because he did what he was told to do?

So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, We are unworthy servants. We have only done our duty. And then what happens is Luke gives us this story, today's passage.

And I think it's meant to illustrate from a real life event in history, the kind of faith he wants his disciples to have, as opposed to the kind of faith the Pharisees had.

And so with that context in mind, let's now look at our passage and the setting. So point to verse 11. Now, on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

[6:15] Now, it's just one sentence, the setting here, but it actually says a number of things. You see, ever since chapter 9, verse 51, which is really the turning point in Luke's gospel, Jesus has started to head towards Jerusalem.

But if you know your geography, you'd know that Jesus is actually not going in the right direction of Jerusalem. So on the next slide is a map of Israel, and it's divided into three sections.

So you've got the river of Jordan, the Jordan River up the middle, and on the left-hand side is Israel. But really, it was, in Jesus' day, split into three parts. You had Judea down the bottom, and the red dot is where Jerusalem is.

Then you had Samaria, and then at the top, you had Galilee. And so what Jesus is doing is he's actually travelling east and west, where that arrow is.

He's travelling that way. He's not going south to Jerusalem. So why does Luke say that he's on his way to Jerusalem? I mean, what's going on here?

[7:20] Well, the thing to realise is this comment in verse 11 is really a comment about Jesus' determination to die and rise to save sinners.

It's not about getting there quickly. When we drive to a destination, we take the shortest route, don't we? Unless Google Maps sends you off in a different direction. It happened to me two weeks ago.

I was headed to Lower Templestowe to visit someone from 1030 Church, and I ended up in Baldwin. I don't know how. But for Jesus, it's not about getting to his destination quickly. It's about his determination to go through with it completely.

And this is what Luke says in chapter 9, verse 51, the turning point in his gospel. So on the next slide, thanks, Aidan, Luke writes this, Now when the days drew near for him to be taken up, that he's lifted up on the cross and risen to new life, Jesus firmly set his face towards Jerusalem.

In other words, the time for Jesus to be lifted up on the cross and then rise again has come near, and Jesus meets this time with a determination to go through with it.

[8 : 31] He says he set his face towards Jerusalem, not away from it. For this is how Jesus would save people from judgment that our sins deserve.

And these people he would save included the outcasts, people like Samaritans. You see, on the next slide is our map again, and the regions of, you've got the three regions, Judea, Samaria, and then above Galilee.

The real Jews, for the Jews, the real Jews lived down the south in Judea. The second class Jews were in Galilee at the top. But in Samaria, in the middle, they were a mixed race, half-breeds, regarded by the Jews as outcasts and foreigners.

They were despised. And that's why if some Jews went from the bottom, from Judea, up to Galilee, sometimes they'd even cross over to the right-hand side and go up the right-hand side of the river, just to miss Samaria altogether.

That's how much they didn't like them. So if you think of a, it's kind of like, if you think of a map of Australia, and you've got the three states in a row, you've got Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland, Victoria would be the true Aussies, right?

[9 : 48] Queensland, the second class. And you're New South Welshman, the half-breeds. I can say that because I'm from New South Wales. Although, it's the New South Welsh person who gets it right in the end.

But it's in this region of... I couldn't help myself. But it's in this region of outcast territory, on the fringes between Galilee and Samaria, that Jesus is travelling.

Because it's these kind of people that he's actually come to save. And so verse 11 really reminds us of two things. First, that Jesus is determined to die and rise again in Jerusalem to save sinners.

And second, those sinners included people on the fringes of society. Those who were unclean. Point three, verse 12. 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 or literally mercy on us.

[10 : 57] Here, Jesus, is seen by ten men with leprosy. And it's no surprise we meet people like this on the border, on the fringes of society because that's what sickness does, isn't it?

It isolates you and casts you out from society. We get that. I mean, if we are really sick, then we won't go to work. We'll stay at home. We'll isolate ourselves so we don't spread it.

But these men are not just socially isolated. They're also religiously isolated. They're out of their community. On the next slide, we read this from the Old Testament.

It says this, The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, Unclean!

Unclean! He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean and he shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

[12:00] Or in this passage, outside the community. Now, the Old Testament law here was given for the good of the community. It helped make sure that leprosy didn't spread.

But it also reminded the Jews that God is so pure that nothing impure could come near him and not people who were sinful nor even people who had been touched by the effects of a sinful world like with disease.

Of course, God wants them to be able to come near him. That's why he sent Jesus. But this law explains why these ten leopards live on the fringes of society. Why they are both socially and religiously isolated.

In other words, why they didn't have much of a life. And it explains why they didn't come near to Jesus but cried out to Jesus from a distance in a loud voice.

have mercy on us. They are desperate, you see, for healing so that they can have life again. So they call to Jesus, call him master and plead for mercy.

[13:06] And in verse 14, Jesus gives it. Do you see verse 14? When he saw them, he said, go, show yourself to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed.

The priests were the ones who announced whether you were clean or not. Whether you could enter back into your community and life or not. But notice, Jesus commands them to go to these priests before they are healed or cleansed.

And yet, they obey Jesus. In other words, all ten of them believe in Jesus enough to go even before they are healed. They are healed on the way.

And so it seems that all ten of them have enough faith not only to call out to Jesus for mercy but to obey him and go believing they would be healed. Although, if you are suffering from leprosy, then you'd give anything a go, wouldn't you?

Even washing seven times in a dirty river like Naaman. And so it's hard to know just how sincere their faith is until we see it contrasted.

[14:18] Point four, verse 15. 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. See, as all the ten men head off to the priests in town, they are cleansed.

But only one of them stops when he realises and returns back to Jesus. All ten of them cried out in a loud voice for mercy but now only one of them cries out in a loud voice in praise.

And notice, this one person does two more things. First, he goes to Jesus. This man recognises that Jesus is the one through whom God brings cleansing or life.

And this secondly means that he effectively worships Jesus. He literally fell on his face before Jesus' feet. That's pretty much a sign of worship.

[15:32] love, treating him as the Messiah, the King. And he thanked him. And right at the end of verse 16, Luke adds like a bit of a sting in the tail and he was a Samaritan, a half-breed.

Now this implies that the other nine were not. They were probably Jews from Galilee. But Luke leaves this contrast that he was a Samaritan right to the end of the verse, like a sting in the tail because it was the Jews who should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the King.

And yet, it's the half-breed who does. In fact, the nine don't even thank Jesus. I mean, you would have thought this was common courtesy. We teach our children to say please and thank you even for a cup of water.

How much more so when you're given life from leprosy? It's not as though they just forgot in their excitement. They would have seen the Samaritan stop and return to Jesus, I think.

They would have been prompted to do the same, but they don't. In verse 13, they call Jesus master, yet they don't treat him like it, do they? And so the faith they had at the start seems to be, well, a superficial faith, not a sincere one.

[16:56] And a superficial faith is really no faith at all because it does not save. That's what Jesus implies next. Do you see verse 17? Jesus asked, were not all ten cleansed?

Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? Then he said to him, rise and go, your faith has literally, it's a bad English version, but literally it says, your faith has saved you.

See, Jesus himself highlights the contrast between the nine who left and the one who returned. They were all healed, which means they all had reason and first-hand evidence to believe in Jesus, yet nine of them, once they got what they wanted from Jesus, then ignore him.

Their actions show their faith is superficial, but in contrast, the Samaritans' actions show his faith is sincere. And Jesus says it's this faith that saves.

your faith has literally, verse 19, saved you. And so now he's not only been given you physical life, he's also been given you spiritual life, life eternal, life to the full.

[18:12] I mean, you can't get any fuller life than eternal life. And so this Samaritan is one of the fringe people whom Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to save spiritually.

But the point for us today is that, a sincere faith, a saving faith, will show itself in two ways. First, it will rightly recognize Jesus for who he is. And second, it will then rightly respond to Jesus in submission, in praise and thanks.

That's why Luke includes this story here, I think. Remember the context of the chapter? Jesus is teaching his disciples what it means to follow him compared to the Pharisees who are kind of like the nine who have a superficial faith.

But to have a sincere faith in Jesus, to be a disciple of Christ, is to recognize who Jesus is and to respond to Jesus in submission and thanks. So at the beginning of chapter 17, Jesus tells them not to cause others to stumble to remember, but to forgive people when they sin.

In verse 5, they say, increase our faith. It's all too hard for us to do. We need more faith, they say. In verse 6, Jesus says, well, it's not about the quantity of your faith, it's about the quality of your faith.

[19:28] It's about having a sincere faith like this Samaritan. For a sincere faith can do the impossible. It can save us from hell and give us life eternal, new spiritual life now, a new physical life later in glory, which will last forever.

Now, what's more, a sincere faith like the Samaritan will not demand thanks from the Master, but rather verse 9 and 10, will acknowledge their unworthiness and serve the Master.

Just like the Samaritan did by falling on his face at Jesus' feet, in submission, treating Jesus as Master, giving humble thanks. You see, Luke is showing us what it means to have a sincere faith as a disciple of Christ.

And so the first question for us today is, do we have that kind of faith? It's not about quantity, it's about quality. Do we believe in Jesus?

For it's only by believing in him that we are saved. And for us who do, then do we live it out? Do we show our faith is sincere by our actions?

[20:42] Or do our actions show a superficial faith that happily takes from Jesus without rightly recognizing Jesus or responding to Jesus?

I've had over the years, couples come to me to have their child baptized and we work through the good news about Jesus and they say they believe, yet after the child is baptized, I never see them again.

They don't return to be part of God's family, to join in praise and thanks to God for the gift of his child. They're like the seed in the parable of the sower that falls on rocky or thorny ground.

They believe to start with, they say they do and they're enthusiastic about it, but then easily distracted and drift away. Or as Christmas approaches, we'll have a number of people who will come to church for their dose of carols and religion, but we won't see them again until Easter.

Some of them have even told me that they believe in Jesus, but is their faith real, sincere? Of course, only God knows for sure, but what do their actions suggest?

[21:55] See, for us who sincerely believe, then we ought to show up by rightly recognising Jesus for who he is, our saviour and our master. And it ought to show by rightly responding to Jesus in submission, praise and thanks, like the Samaritan.

We can't literally fall before Jesus' feet, after all, he's in heaven, but we can submit and serve him with all that we have, including our money. Yep, here's the money bit.

But you see, it's our money in particular which will show us the type of faith we have. Because it's easy to say thank you with our words, it's much harder to say thank you with our wallets.

You see, for us to give money away for gospel work, then we really have to believe in it, don't we? we sincerely have to believe that Jesus is our saviour and master.

We sincerely have to believe that Jesus went to Jerusalem and took our judgment for our sins, so that we can have new spiritual life now with new physical life later, life eternal, life to the full.

[23:02] We really have to believe that he's the only one who saves us and others from hell. people. And if we sincerely believe that, then we'll thank him, not just with our lips, but with our lives as well, including our money.

There's a lady from one of the morning congregations, she is a single lady, so she only has a single income. In fact, she's been studying and so doesn't even have a full single income, and yet she recently gave \$3,000 to help Andrew Reid set up a college in Singapore.

Why? Because she sincerely believes in Jesus, and her sincere faith seeks to thank God for Jesus, not only with her lips, but with her life as well, including money.

Well, just last week, someone anonymously gave \$50,000 for gospel ministry. Why? Well, I take it it's because they sincerely believe in Jesus.

And so their sincere faith seeks to thank God for Christ, not only with their lips, but with their lives as well, including their money. Now, I was hesitant to mention figures because it's not about the amount, it's about the thankful heart and the sincere faith behind it.

[24:27] But I mention the figures because they do show that it has to come from a sincere faith and a thankful heart. you don't give that type of amount otherwise.

And for this lady, I know at least that she gave it joyfully. Now, sometimes it's hard to give such heartfelt and joyful thanks, even with our lips. After all, what has happened in history at the cross is so familiar to us, isn't it?

I mean, I've heard it so many times. In fact, I've spoken it so many times that I can forget how extraordinary it is. So I need to force myself to stop for a moment and reflect, to make time to ponder at what Christ has given me and what it cost him to do it.

I need to read again real life stories like this one where the Samaritan was so overwhelmed by what Christ did for him that he couldn't help but return to Christ in praise and thanks.

Or like those people I mentioned who just joyfully gave. And so sometimes when I say grace at the dinner table with the kids, I'll pause and I'll add a bit more than just the usual.

[25 : 42] My standard thanks is thank you God for this food and for Jesus who died for us. But I'll pause with the kids sometimes and add a bit more in their language to get them to pause and reflect.

I try not to go on too long, otherwise I'll say, it's not Sunday, stop preaching. But you see, the way to strengthen a sincere faith and enliven a thankful heart is to reflect on Christ.

To pause and remember that the boss of the universe came down from heaven and did go to Jerusalem to suffer hell in our place so that we could be saved from it and given life to the full.

So keep pausing to reflect on Christ. Thank you for your sincere faith. I've seen it demonstrated in many ways. But keep pausing to reflect on Christ that your sincere faith might continue to show itself in service, praise and thanks.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to keep pausing to reflect. reflect on what Christ has done for us so that our sincere faith might be strengthened and shown by our actions, shown by the way we rightly recognize Christ as our Savior and rightly respond in submission, thanks and praise.

[27 : 18] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.