

Luke 17:11-19 "Gospel Gratitude"

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you all. If you'll turn with me to Luke 17 this morning. We're going to look together at this brief story I talked with the kids about earlier.

This is not a Mother's Day sermon other than being a story about someone who does really wonderful things for people and only gets thanked 10% of the time.

Some of you got that. I hope that more than one in ten of us will express our gratitude to our mothers today. They've done much for which we ought to be thankful.

I do know it can also be a painful day. I trust we will love each other well and thoughtfully as we honor our mothers today. I want us to read the story together from God's Word beginning at verse 11 of Luke 17.

[1:07] Notice as we do that pretty clearly it's not a story merely about good manners. It's not a story merely about physical healing. It's a story that in many ways encapsulates the gospel especially as Luke has been unfolding for us.

The gospel in the life of King Jesus. Let's read it and then ask God's help in understanding and applying it to our lives. Luke 17 at verse 11.

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up 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 went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, Turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

And he fell on his face at Jesus' feet giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answered, Were not ten cleansed?

[2:19] Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? And he said to him, Rise and go your way.

Your faith has made you well. This is God's word. Let's pray together. Father, we give you thanks for your word.

We want to know it more. We understand this story. We want your spirit to work in our hearts that we might understand what you would teach us. How you would change us.

How gratitude could well up within us because of your great mercy to us. Show us Jesus. We ask in his name.

Amen. When I first interviewed at Southwood about ten years ago, I remember talking to Mike Honeycutt, who was the pastor here at that time.

[3:18] And we talked together about some of the spiritual struggles of Southwood and Huntsville in general. And I remember as we broached that subject, the first words out of his mouth kind of surprised me.

He said, We really struggle with being grateful. We struggle with being grateful. You know, that's often hard for successful people or churches.

And the more I thought about it, the more I thought, Yeah, it's hard to be deeply grateful when I feel I've earned or deserve something. Right?

Entitled? Yeah. But grateful? Maybe not so much. I am naturally more like the nine lepers with places to go, things to accomplish, focused on my agenda.

But I remember thinking back then, Well, Mike, if that's y'all's biggest problem, I mean, there's a lot of worse things out there, right? That's not a big deal. But then you read a passage like this, where Jesus teaches us that gratitude should actually motivate and transform the lives of his followers, that it's the fuel and passion for following Jesus for all of our lives.

[4 : 40] And you realize what a spiritually dangerous position ingratitude creates. And you may say, Hold on, Will, this passage just talks about a leper saying thank you.

Where do you get the idea that this is about the entire lives of all followers of Jesus? It's a good question. Thanks for asking. See, in this whole section of Luke, as Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem and the cross, he's talking and teaching us about life in his kingdom.

He's told us what makes it so unique, how different priorities and different values shape those who are a part of his kingdom community. And at the beginning of this chapter, he has continued doing that and just finished up in verses 7 through 10 by assuring us that even when we do everything that he tells us to do and do it really well, we are merely what?

Unworthy servants who have done our duty. In other words, we haven't done anything that obligates God to do something for us.

He doesn't owe us anything. So you might ask the question, why bother? If following Jesus, doing good works like he tells me, doesn't get me anything from God, and on the flip side, he's already told us that our good works, not what keeps God from smiting us either, it's Jesus, then why do anything?

[6 : 22] Where's the motivation? I don't get God's divine attention or blessing, and I don't keep him off my back or off my case, so why bother following what Jesus says?

In the story of the lepers, Jesus is going to teach us about the heart of gratitude that should motivate and animate all of our lives. So notice first, how does this work?

Gospel gratitude flows from an appropriate sense of desperation. This is where deep gratitude truly begins.

Look with me at verse 12. As Jesus entered a village, he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

Try to picture the desperation of these lepers. First of all, they're lepers, right? So in addition to having some awful skin disease, according to God's law, Leviticus tells us they're cut off from community.

[7 : 33] So they're away from their homes, can't be with their families, can't spend time with friends, can't be a part of the worship of God's people. They're social, spiritual outcasts.

Can you understand why they'd be standing at a distance from Jesus and the in crowd, as it were? In fact, the leper we read the most about, the one who says thank you, is not only a leper, he's a Samaritan, further cementing his outsider status with a Jew like Jesus and those around him.

It's interesting, by the way, isn't it, that this group of ten lepers included Jews and Samaritans who usually would have had, what?

Nothing at all to do with each other. But their leprosy brought them together. Recognizing their common need and desperation as outsiders really connected them across otherwise insurmountable barriers.

That's a neat thought for us, isn't it? What would it take for you to connect with somebody that seems so far away from you? Maybe it'd be a place like that.

[8 : 53] Do you know that feeling of not belonging? They felt it strongly. Their desperation as they felt it, it didn't cause them to say, hey, I've got a polite request.

I'd like to put a card in. No, they cried out. They lifted up their voices pleading loudly, Jesus, have mercy on us.

We don't deserve anything. We're desperate. We just beg you for mercy. And how does Jesus respond?

He responds to that plea powerfully, doesn't He? We've just been taught in the previous verses that God doesn't respond to our good deeds, to the things that we do.

He doesn't respond to deeds, but He responds to desperation, doesn't He? Over and over again we see it. God meeting the needs of the needy. God working on behalf of the helpless.

[9 : 56] God responding to desperation. Just stop and think about that for a minute. How hopeful is that truth? That part of God's character, that that's how He is?

When you cry to Him in desperation, He hears. He responds. That's glorious. Comforting.

Hopeful. But we need to stop and ask the question of ourselves. God's like that, but am I actively desperate?

Most of us, most days, wake up not really feeling that, don't we? A couple of weeks ago, I offered to have people pray after the service with anyone who needed prayer.

And a few of you showed up and prayed together. That's wonderful, and I'm not griping at the rest of you. But when I was in India, in a room of 2,000 people, and a service ended, and there was warm food that you could already smell waiting for you downstairs, a few people left to eat.

[11 : 08] And most of the room of 2,000 went down front seeking anybody who would pray with them. Person after person after person, please pray for me.

I say this not to guilt you all into showing up for a prayer time, but just to let us get a window into the reality that we're often not actively desperate, are we?

We don't feel that. Have you considered yourself lately before a holy God? Have you stopped and thought about that long enough to feel you need to keep your distance from Him?

and to get desperate for Jesus, somebody to stand in between you? I'm a pastor who counsels people regularly about their marriages, and still at times, I disrespect and neglect the one bride I picked to love.

I'm a parent who's supposed to help my kids navigate the challenges of culture and technology, and still I often use my phone selfishly and distractedly.

[12 : 22] I've been following Jesus for 35 years, and still I'm more cowardly and self-protective than I am bold with the Gospel. Jesus, have mercy on me!

Could you laundry list those things? I don't have it all figured out. I can't hold it all together. I just can't keep up these days.

Jesus, do you ever feel that way? Maybe take just a minute and consider that this morning. Maybe write down at least one category maybe, an area where you possibly could feel actively desperate.

I don't know how you feel, but have you gotten lately to where Paul got in Romans 7?

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Help! Jesus, have mercy on me! Friends, listen.

[13 : 28] God loves to respond to that cry. It's such good news that He's like that. If that's where you are this morning, if that's all you've got in you is just help!

Jesus, I'm at the end. I've got nothing else. Just help! You need to know He hears your cry. He will meet you there with exactly what you need. But then as you continue in the story, as Jesus meets them in their desperation, we see that gospel gratitude not only flows from that desperation, but flows into a life of worshipful delight.

After they're healed, look at verse 15. Then one of them, when he saw he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks.

Now, he was a Samaritan. You may say, when I talk about a life of worshipful delight, that's giving the Samaritan too much credit. But consider what he's risking here.

It's not hard to understand, is it, what the other nine are up to? I mean, think about it. They're rushing off to the priest so that he can pronounce them clean and restore them to their communities.

[14 : 48] How much would you have missed your family after weeks, months, years perhaps, separated from them, longing to rush back and get to be with them?

They're making up for lost time, aren't they? Can you relate to that? Would you maybe feel that way? The reason Jesus so commends the faith that he sees demonstrated by the Samaritan is that the healed leper risks all these joys of life that would be lying before him to do what?

To return to Jesus. Perhaps the miracle will stop. Perhaps this Jewish teacher will see me up close and realize that I'm a Samaritan and he'll stop this healing right here.

Perhaps I'm going to miss out on something big going on back at home. Regardless, it's worth the sacrifice to return to Jesus' feet to worship and say thank you, isn't it?

The Samaritan gives praise to God and he does it, interestingly enough, loudly again. Words here that are even stronger than the ones earlier when they all cried for help.

[16 : 06] It says, with a loud voice. We're not told the exact words, but I think if he were in a Presbyterian church, someone would have looked at him sideways like he forgot how to behave.

You can't do that. You can't worship Jesus that way. Y'all, sometimes I wonder what's wrong with us that they can sit up here and make loud noises like that, but we can't.

The joy that comes bowing before Jesus sometimes make you say things that probably made some of the other people a little uncomfortable. But that's where he was.

Did he care? He wasn't worried about the crowd around Jesus. He was going back to his Savior. In the presence of Jesus, he doesn't care what they think. He delights in his cleansing.

His grateful worship demonstrates his true faith that Jesus says shows he actually understands what has been done for him. Maybe that's what it would sound like if it hit home for us.

[17 : 06] Is my life marked by delight even as I sacrifice? In other words, am I so overcome by the mercy I've been shown by my Savior that worshiping him with all I am might cause me to miss out on something else and I wouldn't care?

Would I gladly sacrifice any number of important things to see the name of Jesus made known? You see what I mean?

This is not a story simply about making you feel that, hey, after all that Jesus did for you, don't you think you could come to church a few more times each year to worship Jesus?

Or don't you think maybe he's done so much you should pray a couple more times and tell him thank you. You see how that's not what's going on? At least that's not all that's going on.

It's much bigger than that, isn't it? Y'all, when we truly see our desperate state as sinners and the cleansing and new life that Jesus has purchased for us, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

[18 : 18] Not just an hour, a week, and a few minutes a day, right? It's so much bigger than that. He's risking everything. I'd do anything for him.

I want everyone to know what he's done for me. And that's gratitude motivating good works, isn't it? Because I've seen my desperation and delight in the forgiveness of Jesus, I'll do anything not to gain God's blessing.

I already have it. Not to avoid God's smiting me, he's pouring out his blessing on me, but to express my gratitude and my delight in him.

A pastor friend of mine tells the story of a 10-year-old little girl who went to school on Valentine's Day and came home with a basket of treats from her friends. Some of you have probably done that before, right, kids?

It's a great day. You come home with all this candy. And she took it upstairs and put it in her room. Well, a couple of days later, her mom walked into her room and the sister wasn't there, but guess who was?

[19 : 28] Little brother. Three-year-old little brother. And the mom found him there with the Valentine's treats except she caught him a few minutes too late. When she found him there, his hands were covered with chocolate and his cheeks were covered with chocolate.

It was running down his neck and he knew he was busted. He was standing there and the wrapper of this big chocolate teddy bear that his sister had been given by a friend was on the ground next to him and he stood there covered in the chocolate.

What did he do when he saw his mom? He burst into tears. Oh, he knew what was coming now. He knew how bad it was and he was stuck here and his mother walked him down the hall, took him by the hand and walked him down the hall to his sister, his 10-year-old sister who apparently loved Jesus more than she loved chocolate.

She said to her little brother, oh, buddy, it's okay. I love you anyway and always. Sometimes hearing the gospel from kids is overwhelming.

When we hear what God feels towards us, in that moment, that three-year-old little boy who's bawling tears, knowing the terrible things that are coming, his tears turned into giggles, you know, when you kind of worked up and you realize it's going to be okay.

[20 : 58] And then he started laughing as he embraced his sister and she carried him off to wash him and get him clean. desperation turned to delight in the embrace of the one who forgave his sin and covered his shame.

That's what gospel gratitude is. That's who's at the center of gospel gratitude. It's Jesus. Gospel gratitude keeps us at the feet of Jesus himself.

Desperation drives us there and delight flows from our relationship with him. But at the center of the whole thing is Jesus himself.

And we just keep clinging to him. The healing, in fact, makes it clear in this story that only Jesus truly cleanses.

That's the point. Remember verse 14? When Jesus saw them, he said to them, go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed.

[22 : 10] Why the priest? Why go to the priest? Well, see, in this time, the priest for this group of people was responsible in forcing laws given by God to declare someone sick or cut off from the community.

And if something changed, he also could declare that they were healed and could be restored to community. But that's all.

Just declare it. Not do it. The priest didn't heal anyone. A human priest doesn't actually heal or cleanse you.

No, the lepers are supposed to learn by being cleansed on the way as they went that only Jesus cleanses. So the power of Jesus on display goes well beyond any human priest, doesn't it?

And the Samaritan gets it. It's not really the priest I have to go see. There's someone even better I need to go back to. They all realize Jesus gave them a great blessing.

[23 : 16] Only he seems to realize what it says about who Jesus is. Listen, counting your blessings can be helpful in making you more grateful.

It's not a bad practice. But as Peter reminded us so helpfully last week, that's not enough. It's actually Jesus himself that we truly need, not merely his blessings.

And only this outsider realizes it in this story. Sometimes it's hard for those of us who live in it and have spent our whole lives in it. Have you so taken for granted the forgiveness, the adoption, the mercy, the eternal security that you've been taught about for years and years in church?

That you've stopped letting them drive you to the feet of Jesus? Do you remember those blessings are yours only in Christ?

Is time with Jesus still central to who you are? That is, after all, the essence of following Jesus, right? Our desperation drives us to Jesus.

[24 : 32] Our delight flows out of resting in Jesus, abiding in him, it's not a one-time visit to Jesus and he sends me off to live this delightful life where I never have another trouble in the world the rest of my days.

That's not the idea. No, it's more like this diagram where my desperation keeps driving me to Jesus.

We are to remain actively desperate, constantly driven back to Jesus over and over and over, abiding in him, not just visiting him once, over and over again finding ourselves at his feet, delighting in who he is.

That's the place from which we live a life of gratitude. We're honest about our desperation. We're delighting in our Savior.

Are you with Jesus enough to let that kind of gratitude shape every moment of every day? Do you really trust him enough to risk all the other good things you might miss while you're at his feet?

[25 : 50] Does your delight in Jesus really surpass all the other delights in your life? Or does delight in Jesus seem to be, I can only ever think of that in the rear view mirror.

It's way back there somewhere. Do you actually really feel at great distance from him today if you're honest? Remember where all ten lepers started the story?

Where were they? Standing at a distance from Jesus. Nine of them end the story without leprosy but still at a distance from Jesus, don't they?

Where are the nine? Jesus says. Where are they? Can't see them. Is that kind of where you feel you are today?

Maybe go this afternoon and talk with Jesus about your desperation. even just the desperation of wanting to feel near him again.

[26 : 58] Wanting to feel that he's really there and he really cares about you. Maybe that's all you can think of that you're desperate about or maybe it's something you wrote down earlier. Whatever it is, just cry out to him.

He'd love to hear from you, to meet with you. Would you take the time to do that today? Nine healed lepers hurrying on with life.

Busy but distant from Jesus. But one former leper is on his face at the feet of Jesus no matter what it costs him.

With great delight he's clinging to Jesus and going wherever Jesus tells him. We can live a life of gratitude and delight like that in Jesus.

Like the three year old covered in chocolate clinging to his sister doing whatever she asks so delighted to be in her arms. In fact our delight in Jesus and our gratitude to Jesus must be even greater than that right?

[28 : 10] Jesus hasn't merely given up a chocolate bear for us. He has given his very life for us hasn't he? He finished that trip that he was on to Jerusalem and to the cross to lay down his life for us.

Jesus has become the ultimate leper for us. Cut off from the community of God.

Alone hanging there suffering the immense pain. Why? So that we can be welcomed to this table with him.

Isn't that what he told his disciples when they were celebrating the Passover lamb who was the one who had died shed his blood so that they could live? What did Jesus say about that?

In Matthew 26 he says as they're eating Jesus took bread and after blessing it he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said take eat this is not the Passover lamb this is my body and he took a cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying drink of it all of you for this is not the blood of that lamb you think back to that died so God's people could live this is my blood of that covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins y'all this table is not for decent people it's for desperate people who come being desperate enough that they know they need a savior and they come clinging to Jesus if you don't actively trust Jesus this morning then I encourage you not to come and partake of this table but you can still come up here with us and just let us pray with you and if you'd like even to talk with you later about

[30 : 14] Jesus we'd love that if you're a Christian who has trusted Jesus but you're not actively desperate by which I mean you're not willing to let go of that sin you're thinking about right now you're actually clinging to that not wanting to repent but hoping secretly that it will eventually fulfill you then don't come to this table and partake come let us pray with you that God would renew your desperation for Jesus and your hope to be found in him but if you're a desperate sinner who knows your need this morning who is crying out for Jesus help and knowing that he's the only place you can turn then come to Jesus he wants to meet you here and remind you of his love and meet with you and give you delight in him let's pray and we'll celebrate together father we give you thanks for sending your son that we who don't deserve to be here might have the thing we should be most grateful for a relationship with you fellowship at your table would you use these common elements to teach our hearts again something that we forget so easily how much you delight in us thank you

Jesus be work in our hearts we ask in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org oh oh the pores are the in the love and see y I may fall like and in those