

Generous Gratitude

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[0:00] Good morning, church. For those of you who don't know me, I'm John, and we're going to be unpacking that passage. What if I told you there's a trait that can make people happier without working on their happiness and make them better, and by better I mean more generous, more honest, more kind, more everything good without a single lesson in morality?

So I almost feel like we need to do a little bit of a drum roll. What's this magical attribute? Gratitude. There are a number of psychology manuals and even scientific studies that will tell us the benefits of gratitude.

Greater energy levels, better sleep, reduced blood pressure, feeling less lonely, improved emotional and mental health, increased joy. People who are grateful typically feel more optimistic and better about their lives.

People who have a disposition of gratitude report lower levels of depression and stress. Quite simply, it's being thankful. A few years ago, I went to buy a pair of shoes, and I said, please and thank you, and the guy was so surprised, he said, I'll give you \$20 off because I haven't heard good manners for a long time.

True story. But there is a difference between saying thank you and being thankful. The spiritual discipline of gratitude may have some of the same impact on mental health, but it's a different thing altogether.

[1:32] Its focus is on being thankful to the giver, the generous God who is the source of all beauty, goodness and love and joy in this life.

When we are grateful to God, when we treasure Jesus, we are thankful no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, or how out of control the world may seem.

We open our eyes to the evidence that our Heavenly Father loves us beyond all measure.

Goodness flows from gratitude, but nothing much good flows from the opposite, ungratefulness.

Being unthankful is not new to our time. It's also true that people are becoming less grateful. Have you noticed nowadays when you let people in, they don't give you the wave anymore? You're thinking, just say thank you?

Come on, I'll let you in. Why is this? I think it's because people are feeling more entitled. The more people think they should get what they want, the more people feel a sense of self-importance.

[2:35] So even when they get what they want, they'll be less grateful because of their high view of themselves. I deserved it in the first place. And if they don't get what they want, they're going to feel unhappy or even angry.

Think about it. The less you feel entitled, the more grateful you will be for whatever you get, and the happier you'll be. As a result, we can almost guarantee that we'll be unhappy if we're ungrateful.

Ungratefulness, though flourishing in our culture, has always been endemic to the human soul.

Christian culture is not immune, especially if we feel entitled or have an inflated opinion of our own self-importance.

So the contemporary disease that afflicts others can also attach itself to Christians. In some cases, apart from our hasty prayers of thanks at mealtimes, often no one would even know Christians have had a reason to be grateful as recipients of the grace of God.

We've been working through the travel narratives of Luke's Gospel, and we've seen that God is generous. And this morning, we're going to look at the appropriate response.

[3:53] Generous gratitude. You can follow along on the St. Paul's app. We've just heard an account of 10 lepers in Luke 17. We can learn about gratitude here in a powerful way.

10 men crying out to Jesus in various stages of decay. They had a highly infectious nerve disease, their clothing torn, extremities curled and knulled, blotches of discoloured skin, the stench of rotting

flesh, their skeletal heads uncovered, death by inches.

They would have looked as though they'd climbed out of the grave. They would have been cast in one of those zombie movies that are out nowadays. But they're alive, sensitive human beings, feeling souls, living in the netherworld of society's fringe while they rotted away.

Immediately when the leprosy was discovered, they would have been driven out of the village, not even time to pack a bag, no longer able to experience human touch, a kiss from their spouse or a hug from their children.

Cut off from society. No shopping, no eating out with friends, no holidays. Your working life is over. You watch as your extremities rot away and become deformed.

[5 : 11] Here's the following instruction from God's people from Leviticus, chapter 13, verse 45.

Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, unclean, unclean.

As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean. They must live alone. They must live outside the camp. It's the lonely life of the living dead.

In verse 11, while we're not given a specific location, we're told where Jesus is heading and as he confronts these 10 men from the living dead. Now, on his way to Jerusalem.

Earlier in chapter 9, verse 51, we read, Jesus resolutely set his face on Jerusalem. And this theme continues. Jesus is determined to head towards the place of his death by crucifixion.

The cross, the place of mercy and rescue and healing from the disease of the spiritual equivalent of leprosy, the sin that alienates and leaves us amongst the living dead.

[6 : 27] Luke tells us that this mercy and rescue and healing is the reason that Jesus came. He tells us that again now as if this story has something to say about that mercy and rescue and healing.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is confronted by 10 lepers. It's on the outskirts of an unnamed village in no man's land between Samaria and Galilee, just the place for the living dead.

The land of limbo. From a safe distance, they shouted the traditional plea in verse 13. Jesus, Master, have pity on us.

They were loud and persistent. It's literally, have mercy on us. Master, have mercy. Mercy, please. Once Jesus saw them, he immediately responded.

But you'll notice in previous encounters with people with leprosy has reached out and touched them or has spoken a word, be clean. Not this time. None of those pronouncements.

[7 : 31] He says, go and show yourselves to the priests. The command was for them to do what a cured leper would do. The regulations in Leviticus 14 required you to be examined by a priest.

If you were cured, they would then joyfully undergo an eight-day cleansing ritual and then be reunited with their families. Jesus' command requires them to step out in faith.

After all, it was a long way to the temple. What fools they would be if they tried to see a priest if they were still leprous. On the other hand, they had everything to gain and nothing to lose.

So they set out shuffling at a leper's pace. The second half of verse 14 says, as they went, they were cleansed. It's a mass healing.

There's no mirrors to reflect the dramatic change. They felt it. They saw it in each other instantly. Energy flooding through the veins in an instant. In a moment, warmth where there'd been numbness.

[8 : 36] Strength where there'd been atrophy. No longer stooped, but standing tall, heads lifted, cleaned, healed. It was like 10 new births.

A wild celebration would have quickly begun. Among those 10 lepers was a Samaritan and according to John chapter 4 verse 9, Jews did not associate with Samaritans and likewise Samaritans and Jews.

But these men had been united by their common misery. Nine Jews and one Samaritan in a suffering community. When the healing occurred, the Samaritan was seized with an irresistible emotion of gratitude.

Captured to his spontaneous gratitude, he put off going to the temple to rush back to Jesus. The official clean bill of health could wait. His family and friends and business could wait.

The thankful Samaritan knew he had two to thank for this healing, God and Jesus. He didn't know that the two were one. His generous gratitude, first he said, thank you to God.

[9:43] One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. Earlier, he'd called out loudly for healing and now he was loud with his praise.

The original word here for loud voice, it's quite interesting, it should be recognisable to us for the English year, faune megele. It's where we get the word megaphone.

So his voice was mega voiced in his praise to God. Mega. Thank you, Jesus. He thanked Jesus. Verse 16, he threw himself at Jesus' feet and he thanked him and he was a Samaritan. He literally fell upon his face at Jesus' feet and at the very least he recognised Jesus was an agent of God. But more likely he realised that Jesus was a king. He returned to Jesus with a heart overflowing with generous gratitude and glory to God and he thanks Jesus.

[10:46] He recognises God's power in Christ. Jesus then asks three closely coordinated questions. Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?

Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? The questions aren't rhetorical. Jesus expected all ten to return glorifying God and then to receive the ultimate blessing he had prepared for them.

Jesus is disappointed. Evidently, the other nine were so caught up in their new wholeness that it did not occur to them to return to Jesus. And this is understandable at one level.

After all, Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priest. Of course, they were thankful. How could they be otherwise? They were deeply happy and eager to get back to everyday life.

But how prone are we to be anxious to receive but too careless to give thanks? So there's a deadly problem here. God was not the centre of the gratitude.

[11:54] Note Jesus' final question in verse 18. Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? Only the Samaritan, the foreigner, gave praise to God.

The vague gratitude of the other nine was not an adequate response to what had happened. Christ wanted their hearts. By failing to glorify God and returning thanks to Jesus, they missed the greatest possible moment of their existence.

And it's here in verse 19. Rise and go. Your faith has made you well. or more literally, your faith has saved you.

And this is the studied opinion of the most prominent scholars in the world on Luke's Gospel. We've got to let Jesus' declaration, your faith has saved you, have its deepest meaning.

The Samaritan, the one held in contempt by Jews who saw them as unspiritual half-breeds, received forgiveness, reconciliation, eternal life.

[12:59] and the healing not only of his physical uncleanness but his spiritual moral sickness, the alienation and distance between God because his sin has been completely removed.

Jesus' words are clear. Only the Samaritan who returned to praise God and offer thanksgiving to Christ himself had saving faith. His gratitude and praise to God were signs of his saving faith.

No one is saved by virtue of having a pleasant, optimistic or thankful spirit. Jesus is not teaching salvation by disposition but Jesus is teaching that where there is true faith there's profoundly thankful hearts.

Thanksgiving is a normal result of a vital union with the Lord Jesus and a direct measure of the extent to which we are experiencing the reality of that relationship in our daily lives.

Generous gratitude to God is at the heart of authentic faith. Conversely, the hearts of those who do not know Christ are ungrateful.

[14:10] In Romans 1 verse 21 it says that sin is an attitude that not only ignores God but refuses to thank him. Romans 1 verse 21 it says for although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.

It's not just those outside the church who don't give thanks to God. The religious inside the church can do the same. In 2 Timothy 3 1 to 5 it says some have a form of godliness but actually don't recognise God's daily work in their lives.

Instead they are lovers of themselves lovers of money they're proud they're conceited in other words entitled there boastful without love unforgiving ungrateful and actually goes on to say have nothing to do with those kinds of people.

That's in the church. Generous gratitude is at the core of those who love God they're thankful. And the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche classical scholar and self-confessed critic of Christianity once said he would believe in the redeemer if the redeemed looked a little more redeemed.

What he was saying was that he never got the impression from Christians that he met that they'd had a life to be joyous about or a future to rejoice in. His opinion was if it's true that Jesus is God and died on the cross for your sin and rose from the grave and he rules sovereignly over all things for your good and offers forgiveness and hope of eternal life and joy well I don't get the impression that you're loved because you're so serious and dour and stern and thankless.

[16:01] Taking for granted all the worldly provisions and spiritual blessings that God has so richly lavished on us and failing to give him thanks is actually one of the sins that seem to we just accept.

Too many of us might not even regard it as a sin. We don't even bat an eyelid if someone complains on the way to church or grumbles over morning tea. How many of us in that moment just go silent in the presence of an habitual grumbler and fail to point them to the blessings of Christ? To be a Christian and be thankless and ungrateful is a contradiction in terms. Gratitude should be the lifeblood of the Christian.

We're saved from God's judgment and the wrath to come. We're loved and we're forgiven. We're made his children. Our biggest worries go into insignificance when we know a bigger God who did not withhold his one and only son from us who traded places with us.

You see Jesus was tempted in the wilderness without sin. He was forced to live on the fringe preaching and healing on the outskirts of towns. He prayed in lonely places.

[17:19] He was an outcast shunned and rejected and ultimately trading places with us spiritual lepers on the cross where he's nailed in our place becoming unclean lonely shunned and despised and interestingly the same way the leper praised Jesus in a mega phoney voice we use that same word in Greek Jesus cried out his last words it is finished so we can be children of God made clean and welcomed we need a reminder to count our blessings to cling to the cross we're not entitled to God's grace we have nothing to offer God there can be no pride like the leper we can only fall to our knees before Jesus with generous gratitude even when we've been wounded by a friend even when things aren't the way we want we want them to be in society or in our family or at church even when sickness hits us even when the finances don't reach to actually be able to say

God is good to me thankfulness is not linked to whether our circumstances are good or not that is how every human lives the Christian has a reason and a hope to be thankful in all things we've got so much to be thankful for the scriptures remind us lamentations and remember lamentations written the time when the temple has been destroyed and they're going into exile it says the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases his mercies are new every morning great is your faithfulness Thessalonians in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you it goes on to say I'll give you thanks to you Lord with all my heart I'll tell others of your wonderful deeds people should be able to see it when we have the big story of God's love for us in Jesus our little stories seem manageable we can always look at the problem from another window and that window is in Jesus

I have everything I'm loved and secure in the God of the universe and there's a future of eternal joy the Samaritan's response reveals what true faith looks like thank you Jesus does that characterise us does the good news of the free gift of life in Jesus still grip us and move us to be generous in our gratitude gratitude's what we feel and thanksgiving is what we do we need to regularly practice gratitude and it starts by giving thanks to God John Milton the 17th century Puritan wrote this gratitude towards God bestows reverence allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies God working in our lives those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and see the world what are you grateful for what a different world if we could always be grateful to God hearts overflowing with love for Jesus shining the magnificence of what Jesus has done for us has given us and is doing in us as we treasure

Jesus together for God's glory the world will see a reason for our gratitude our hope and our joy for all people we are who have one who have an who have come out