

How Could We Ever Not Thank God?

Lk 17:11-19

23 June 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

I think I once told you about friends we had on a lifestyle block just outside of Foxton. They were not church people! I think they were atheist! We became friends with them through our mutual love for dogs.

One day, this man showed us their garden – all beautiful with exotic shrubs, trees and flowers complemented by birdsong – even pheasant calls!

It was then that I told this man, “Thank God for all He has blessed you with!”

Said he, “Why should I thank God?” “It was *me* and *my wife* who did all of this as we laboured over many years in this garden!”

See? No word of thanks to God!

Perhaps you say, “Yes, Pieter, but that’s how atheists live!” “They never acknowledge God, let alone expressing their gratitude to Him!”

Well, that may be true! But allow me to ask, “Do *church people* thank God – and thank Him from the heart?” “Do *you & I* thank Him often enough?”

You see, that’s what our text is all about – showing our gratitude to God for all He *has* done, *is* doing and has promised *to still do* for all His loved ones!

How could we ever NOT thank God!?

Well, our text gives us the following three points...

- Healed
- Moved to Gratitude
- Shame & Blessing

Healed

Our Lord is on His way from Galilee to Jerusalem!

Which route does He take?

Well, there was the popular route which He *could* take, i.e. the route across the Jordan – the *longer* route; yes, the route which most Jews used to take so that they *did not have to go through the province of the Samaritans*, people whom they despised!

But *Jesus* does not despise sinners! After all, He came to save them! So, what route does Jesus take? Well, He takes *precisely* that route that goes *through* the land of that despised people! Look, did He not know (and plan!!) what was going to happen soon – that ten lepers who thought *they* might find Him, would actually *be found by Him!*?²

So, verse 12 says, ***And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers...***

¹ In putting together this sermon, I have made ample use of the wonderful words of RC Sproul’s audio sermon on Lk 17:11-19, words so well-said that, in some places through this sermon, I could not keep them away from my congregation. For the sermon of Sproul, please cf. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/cleansing-leper-luke/>

² “He went that road to find out these lepers, and to cure them; for he is *found of them that sought him not*” (Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 1887). Peabody: Hendrickson).

Lepers!? Leprosy!? What a horrible & merciless disease!!

You see, in the ancient world, once you were diagnosed with leprosy, you suffered the worst of all possible kinds of quarantines – yes, then you had to live in separation, not just for a week or a month, but *for the rest of your life!* And so, you were removed from the community – removed from your dear family and removed from synagogue/temple worship. Indeed, if you were a leper, you were a social *outcast!* The only fellowship you could then possibly have was with others like yourself – yes, with other miserable lepers! And it didn't matter whether your fellow leper was a Jew or a Samaritan! You see, when you are afflicted with leprosy, *nationality ceases to be a barrier to fellowship.*³ Yes, even if you were a *Jew* and your fellow leper was a hated *Samaritan*, you loved his fellowship, for you're just too happy to have *some* fellowship, to share thoughts about your illness and comfort one another! And so, this explains why there was a *group* of lepers coming to Jesus!

Let's also remember that leprosy – perhaps more than any other illness – was perceived to be because of a specific sin you have committed! Is it now a wonder that He who came to save from sin was so keen to heal lepers!?⁴

Well, gauging by v.12, it's clear these lepers knew the quarantine rules – that's why they stood at a distance. And because they were at a distance, they had to now raise their voices – they had to shout (v.13), “**Jesus, Master, *have mercy on us!***”

The question is: How did they even know who Jesus was? I mean, they had no mass communication gadgets like TV or cell phones! Besides, as lepers, their contact with other people was next to nothing!

Well, the only answer I could think of is that somebody who had seen the miracles performed by Jesus in Galilee, must have come as close to them as the quarantine rules required. Then this person must have shouted out to them, “*There's a Man named Jesus!*” “*He's raising people from the dead!*” “*He's making the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame to walk and leap for joy!*” “*Be on the lookout for Him!*” “*I have seen Him coming this way!*” “*Here's what He looks like: there's always a group of at least twelve men following Him!*” “*We call Him 'Master!'*”⁶

My brother & sister, I don't know exactly how these lepers got to hear of Jesus. But, given who He was and what He had been doing just across the border in Galilee, how could these lepers *not* have heard of Him!?

Well, the day these lepers had dreamed of, the day they had prayed for, finally became a reality when, in the distance, there He was! *It's Jesus! You can hear them talk to each other! You can feel their excitement: “Here He comes!” “He's here!” “Look over there, that's Jesus!” “He raises people from the dead!” “Maybe He can heal us!”*⁷

³ Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.798)

⁴ “The leprosy was a disease which the Jews supposed to be inflicted for the punishment of some particular sin, and to be, more than other diseases, a mark of God's displeasure; and therefore Christ, who came to take away sin, and turn away wrath, took particular care to cleanse the lepers that fell in his way” (Henry, *ibid*)

⁵ For *Master* cf. e.g. v.13. In Greek it is *epistatēs* (ἐπιστάτης) a person of high status, particularly in view of a role of leadership—‘leader, master.’ ἐπιστάτα, δι' ὅλης νυκτὸς κοπιᾶσαντες οὐδὲν ἐλάβομεν ‘Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing’ Lk 5:5 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 738). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁶ Words adapted from Sproul, R.C. audio sermon on Lk 17:11-19 at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/cleansing-leper-luke/>

⁷ Well-phrased words of Sproul (*ibid*)

So, keeping their distance, they shout out (v.13), “**Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.**”

And what does Jesus now do?

Well, strangely, He does not do the *usual* thing! You see, normally Jesus would say, “Be clean!” whereupon the lepers would be instantly clean.

But that’s not what our Lord does this time! No, instead He says (v.14), “**Go and show yourselves to the priests.**” Of course, in saying “Go, show yourselves to the priests,” Jesus is telling these lepers to do what God’s Law⁸ tells lepers to do *when they have already been healed*, i.e. to go to the priest so that the priest can give an authorised diagnosis that they have been cleansed from their leprosy!

So, what does it mean when Jesus tells these lepers, “Go show yourselves to the priests!”? Well, does it not mean that these ten lepers must trust Jesus that, not instantly, but *as they are walking to the priests*, they will get healed?

See? Jesus is testing their faith! Yes, it’s much the same as the command God once gave to the leper-king, Naaman, to whom Elisha said, “Go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan!”⁹ Naaman had to exercise faith! And, by God’s grace, Naaman finally did it!

Well, by grace through faith, these ten lepers, without questioning Jesus’ words, started walking to the priests! Yes, by God’s grace these lepers knew they were not on a fool’s errand!

My brother & sister (dear children), just imagine: *while these lepers are walking along the road – all of a sudden, their fingers are becoming whole; their toes are being healed.*

Their lips and eyelids that had been sagging low because the muscles and sinews had been rotting away, are suddenly becoming firm again! *And the horrible sores on their body are vanishing. And one leper would say to the other, “Look at my hand!” “It’s clean!” And the other one would say, “Mine too!” “It’s happening!”*¹⁰

Congregation, see? It’s like a current of electricity which runs through electric wiring! Yes, in the same way a *current of health and vigour* is now running through these ten lepers’ bodies!¹¹

⁸ Cf. Lev. 14:1-9 *The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²“This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, ³and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look. Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person, ⁴the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two live clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop. ⁵And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water. ⁶He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. ⁷And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field. ⁸And he who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean. And after that he may come into the camp, but live outside his tent seven days. ⁹And on the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair from his head, his beard, and his eyebrows. He shall shave off all his hair, and then he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean.*

⁹ Cf. 2 Ki 5:10-14 *And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.” ¹¹But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, “Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. ¹²Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage. ¹³But his servants came near and said to him, “My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” ¹⁴So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*

¹⁰ My adaptation of Sproul (ibid)

¹¹ Words adapted from Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.798)

*And they were beyond themselves with joy and excitement as their bodies were being cleansed with every step they took on their way to the priests.*¹²

See? If you & I obey God and do what we can, then God will not fail to do for us that which we cannot.¹³

And regarding the *number* that Christ healed in one go, I love what Matthew Henry says: “How *rich* Christ is in *doing good*: *Were there not ten cleansed?* Here was a cure by *wholesale*, a whole *hospital* healed with *one word*’s speaking.”¹⁴

My brother & sister, think with me: If Christ can grant *physical* healing to a whole group in one go, then surely, He can also give *spiritual* cleansing to a whole group in one go – i.e. to all His elect (loved ones).¹⁵

So, here’s a question: Do you realise that, when you received Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, that very instant, you were healed from *spiritual* leprosy – your sins were washed away; you were cleansed & healed!? Do you realise that God now looks at you as somebody who is clean – cleansed from the guilt of sin?

We come to point 2...

Moved to Gratitude

My brother & sister (and dear children), imagine these ten lepers watching one another getting healed!

Imagine their joy!

Now imagine their *eagerness to get to the priest’s house!*

I mean, the *sooner the priest could examine* each one’s whole body, give them the all clear, and write out that certificate for each one, *the sooner they could go home to their families* – to their wives and children, brothers & sisters!

I can see them talking in great excitement and expectation! One guy might have said, “It’s been three years that I’ve been away from my family!” Another guy could have said, “Ha!” “What’s three years!?” “I’ve been in quarantine for the last *ten* years!” Then, some others would say, “Come!” “Don’t talk so much!” “Hurry up!” “We can’t wait to see our family!”

And so, the whole lot started running in the direction of the village priest’s house!

But suddenly one guy says, “Hang on!” “*Wait a minute!*” “*Wait!*” “*We’re clean, aren’t we?*”

“*Yes!*”

“*It was Jesus who made us clean!*” “*We’ve got all day to see the priests!*” “*But first we have to go back and see Him, and thank Him, and honour Him!*”

The rest of the lepers said, “We don’t have time for that!”

*The first one said, “Aren’t you grateful... grateful?” “How can you not be grateful?”*¹⁶

My brother & sister, I’m sure all ten these guys *were* grateful! They simply *had* to be grateful! After all, you can’t be healed of leprosy like that and not be grateful! So, their

¹² Sproul (ibid)

¹³ Henry (ibid), “Observe, *Then* we may expect God to meet us with mercy when we are found in the way of duty. If we do what we can, God will not be wanting to do that for us which we cannot.”

¹⁴ Henry (ibid)

¹⁵ “Note, There is an abundance of healing cleansing virtue in the blood of Christ, sufficient for all his patients, though ever so many” (Henry, ibid)

¹⁶ Well-said words of Sproul (ibid)

hearts must have been filled with gratitude, but not so filled that they wanted to make a detour back to Jesus to go say, “Thank You!”

So, what do we see?

Well, don’t we see that it’s one thing to *be* grateful, but something altogether different to *show* it – to manifest it – to *do* gratitude!?¹⁷

Indeed, *feeling* and *doing* are not the same thing!

But the one guy is making a heart-moved decision! He’s turning back to Jesus! You see, he recognised that it was *God* who was at work through Jesus!¹⁸ Yes, in the Master, this leper recognised God’s Representative!¹⁹

So, this one guy wants Christ to have the glory of his healing before *he himself* gets the benefit of it!²⁰

And is he not right? I mean, is it no so that if we delay our thanksgiving, then time will wear out the sense of mercy we have received!?²¹

Besides, remember how the Apostle Paul describes the two basic sins of all who have rejected God? Says Paul (in Rm 1:21), ***For although they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him...***²²

See the two basic sins? It’s *not honouring God*, and *not giving thanks to Him!*²³

Well, this one guy (one out of ten) is moved to gratitude!

So, I imagine this was what he told the other nine: “*Hi mates, we may never meet again!*” “*We spent all this time together in misery!*” “*I have enjoyed your company in misery, but you guys go ahead!*” “*I’m going back!*”²⁴

Children, it’s like when you’re hungry and so keen to take that first bite from plate, but mum & dad say, “Stop!” “We must first give thanks to God for this food!” Then, are you going to be like the nine who didn’t thank God? Yes, are you going to say, “Ah mum, can’t we first eat and then thank God later!?”

Well, look how beautiful!

Luke tells us (in v.15-16) this one guy ***turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.***

Yes, he praised God *with a loud voice* and in all *humility!*! What an example!! You see, this guy expresses his thanks with the *same measure of energy* as a few minutes before when, *in a loud voice*, he begged for healing! Yes, just as ardently as he *prayed* for healing so ardently does he now *give thanks* for his God-granted healing!

You say, “Preacher, how does this apply to our lives?”

¹⁷ Words adapted from Sproul (ibid)

¹⁸ “As with many texts, a fundamental picture of salvation is present here. The Samaritan stopped to recognize that God was at work through Jesus. He understood that God’s blessing came through his agent” (Cf. Bock, D. L. (1996). *Luke* (pp. 444–448). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

¹⁹ Words adapted from Hendriksen (ibid:798)

²⁰ “...he *turned back* towards him who was the Author of his cure, whom he wished to have the glory of it, before he received the benefit of it” (Henry, ibid)

²¹ “...and we ought to be *speedy* in our returns of praise, and not defer them, lest time wear out the sense of the mercy” (Henry, ibid)

²² Rm 1:21 ***For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.***

²³ Sproul (ibid) says it well, “If I would say to you what your most base sin – your worst action of evil is, would you come up with something like “failure to be grateful to God?” Hardly! But there it is – in the Scriptures! And this is our fundamental problem! We think that God owes us everything that we receive... and much more! And if a person is truly grateful, he shows it! And he shows it in worship, and in service to God!”

²⁴ Well-said words of Sproul (ibid)

Well, my brother & sister, when was the last time you thanked & praised God from your heart!?

You see, the moment you/I realise that Jesus washed our sins away – yes, that He *cleansed us from spiritual leprosy* – look, is that not the moment in which you & I should praise/thank God from our hearts!?

After all, are we not “lepers” by our very nature? And has not the God of all mercy and grace, through His beloved Son, made us clean (if it be that we are in Christ Jesus)? So, are we not to fall at His feet in honour, adoration, and worship!? Is this not why we’re here? We’ve been made clean! And we’ve come to give praise, and we’ve come to give thanks!²⁵

Well, that’s praising God for cleansing us from *spiritual leprosy*!

But when was the last time you/I thanked God for all the *other* blessings we have received from Him – yes, when was the last time you thanked God for your husband (for your wife)? When was the last time you thanked God for your children; for your siblings; for your parents – mum & dad?

Do you realise that, apart from having been cleansed from your spiritual leprosy, the greatest gift that you/I could have here on earth is our relationships? After all, is it not so that your relationships will outlast every other gift you received here on earth: your job, your home, your car, your bank account...?

So, when was the last time you praised God for your marriage partner who (apart from forgiveness of your sins), is the greatest gift you have received from God in this life? You see, a husband or wife is not a mere *thing* you got from God! No, he/she is a *living being* higher in value than your house, car, job and other living things like plants and animals! Yes, he is your husband, with a soul! She is your precious wife with a soul! What a costly gift God has given you! So, when was the last time you thanked God for him/her – for your children, your family and your church family!?

Shame and Blessing

I love the way RC Sproul puts it.

You see, as this one man was still lying on his face before Jesus, Jesus says as much as, “*Am I having a problem with My maths?*” “*Did I not just heal ten?*” “*Where are they?*” “*Where are the other nine?*”

“*O Sir, they’re on their way to the priest like You told them!*”

“*Yes, but you came back to say ‘Thank You.’*” “*You came back to give honour!*” “*You came back to praise God!*” “*Where are the rest?*” “*Were there not any found to give glory to God²⁶ except this foreigner?*”

My brother & sister, this man was a Samaritan – Jesus calls him a *foreigner*!²⁷

So, what do we see?

Well, don’t we see that no sinner is beyond healing!?

²⁵ Words adapted from Sproul (ibid)

²⁶ See? Jesus is not so much after glory for Himself, but that His Father should get the thanks/praise due Him!

²⁷ In Greek, *allogenes* (ἀλλογενής), a person belonging to a different socio-political group, with the implication of lack of kinship ties—‘foreigner’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 132). New York: United Bible Societies).

But shame on the other nine!! Did Jesus revoke their cures!?!²⁸ Well, our text does not give any indication that He did! So, despite their ingratitude, their healing remained! But look, what happens now shows us that the Samaritan received more than they!²⁹

Says Jesus to this Samaritan, “Get up! “Go your way! Your faith has made you well” – actually, “Your faith *has saved*³⁰ you!”

Wow!

Now this poor leper was really clean! Now he was really free to go! Now he could go on his way! He could see the priest! He can see his wife; he can see his kids; he can see his friends; he can see his rabbi, because the Lord Jesus Christ cleansed him!

My brother & sister, *do you see it? It’s your story! It’s my story! And it’s God’s story!*

How do you show your thanks to Christ?

How do you give glory and honour to your Redeemer?

That’s what we’re about – saying “Thank You!”³¹

AMEN (2,765 words excluding footnotes)

²⁸ “The rest had their *cure*, and had it not *revoked*, as justly it might have been, for their ingratitude, though they had such a good example of gratitude set before them...” (Henry, *ibid*)

²⁹ “The healings allow these men to return to a normal life, though subsequent events show that the **deliverance is not full forgiveness**” (Bock, *ibid*)

³⁰ σέσωκέν – a Perfect Active Indicative 3rd Person Singular of σῶζω to rescue from danger and to restore to a former state of safety and well being—‘to deliver, to rescue, to make safe, deliverance.’

σῶζω³: καὶ ἀρξάμενος καταποντίζεσθαι ἔκραξεν λέγων, Κύριε, σῶσόν με ‘and as he began to sink, he shouted, Lord, rescue me’ Mt 14:30.

σωτηρία³: ἐνόμιζεν δὲ συνιέναι τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ ὅτι ὁ θεὸς διὰ χειρὸς αὐτοῦ δίδωσιν σωτηρίαν αὐτοῖς ‘and he thought that his own people would recognize that God would provide for their deliverance through him’ Ac 7:25; διὸ παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς μεταλαβεῖν τροφῆς, τοῦτο γὰρ πρὸς τῆς ὑμετέρας σωτηρίας ὑπάρχει ‘therefore, I urge you to take some food, for this is important for your deliverance’ or ‘... for your survival’ Ac 27:34 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 240). New York: United Bible Societies).

³¹ Sproul (*ibid*)