

A New Testament Thanksgiving

(Luke 17:11-19)

(preached Pine Grove 11/26/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

For most people in the country, thanksgiving is over, and it is now time for the season of greed which many call Christmas...

Gone is the sense of giving thanks and in its place comes the season of getting presents...

It is a strange thing to see the shift in so many people who leave the thanksgiving tables early to head to the tables at Wal-Mart...

And the plan is to leave family early in order to get the best deal...

Now, I am not here to complain about Black Friday and even Black Thursday, but it is very interesting to watch the sudden shift of attitude from family time to shopping time that happens every Thanksgiving..

Which to me is a reminder of the shallowness of thanksgiving in the lives of so many people..

While many people ‘say’ they are thankful, that thankfulness is often short lived if it is even thankfulness at all..

With that in mind, I want us to extend the thanksgiving season a few day tonight as we look at what I call a New Testament Thanksgiving...

You see, there was thanksgiving in the Bible long before the pilgrims ever arrived in America at Plymouth Rock...

There was thanksgiving in the Bible long before there were turkeys and sweet potato pies and football games on TV..

No, thanksgiving wasn’t a OT festival or a NT holiday, but I assure you that thanksgiving in its purest form is found all over the Scriptures...

We could see it in Noah after the flood...

We could see it in Abraham after God brought him to the Promised Land..

We could see it in Israel after God brought them through the Red Sea after delivering them from Egypt...

We could see it in the lives of David or Daniel or any number of OT characters...

But tonight I want to take us to the NT and see thanksgiving in the life of someone whose name we don't even know..

All we know about this person is that he demonstrated what true thanksgiving looks like..

And guess what?

You won't see any pumpkins or mums or a big turkey in the story..

You won't see a family gathering or a football game or black Friday sales papers laying around the living room..

Instead, what you will see is man with a problem who finds a solution and then expresses true thanksgiving in the best way possible..

So, let's begin this look at a New Testament Thanksgiving in Luke 17, verses 11-19...

And let's take note of 4 truths of biblical thanksgiving..

The first truth is found in verse 11-13 of Luke 17...

I. Thanksgiving Is a Response to Rescue (11-13)

Let's read verse 11 and set the stage for what we will see tonight...

11 While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing [k]between Samaria and Galilee.

As we parachute into Luke 17, let me set the context of what we are seeing...

This chapter is near the end of Jesus' ministry on earth..

For 3 years, Jesus has been preaching and teaching to the people in Israel...

Though he set up his headquarters in Galilee in the north, he has travelled east, west, south and north and covered most of Israel preaching, teaching, and healing...

But now in Luke 17, he is headed south to Jerusalem one last time to be arrested, tried, and sentenced to death on a cross...

Where he die for sinners and then be resurrected 3 days later...

And so as we get into verse 11, we see that Jesus is headed south to Jerusalem and he is passing through Samaria and Galilee...

Now in the days of Christ, Israel was separated into 3 sections...

Judea in south, Samaria in the center section and Galilee in the north...

And so as Jesus heads to Jerusalem, he is leaving Galilee and headed south, and as he comes to the border of Galilee and Samaria, we arrive at the setting of what is about to take place....

Verse 12...

12 As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him;

In 30 AD, Israel is mainly a country of villages...

And Jesus spent much of his ministry going from village to village...

Therefore, verse 12 is nothing new for Jesus...

He is a traveling evangelist in a sense going from town to town with his message of good news that the Messiah has come into the world to save sinners...

Now by Luke 17, word is out about Jesus...

Many people have been healed by his power...

Thousands of people have been fed by his power to create fish and bread out of thin air on 2 different occasions....

He has raised people from the dead...

In other words, his reputation precedes him as he travels all over the country so it no surprise to see 10 sick people waiting for Jesus as he enters their village...

Sadly, these 10 sick men are a unfortunate picture of how most people viewed Jesus while he walked the earth..

You see, most people in Israel had no use for Jesus' message of repentance and faith in Him that he taught over and over...

Instead, most people people in Israel were only interested in Christ in hopes that he would satisfy some selfish need in their life...

Whether that was feeding them like he did on two occasions by creating bread and fish out of thin air..

Or whether that was by healing a health problem they had...

Or whether they hoped that Jesus would satisfy their need of a political leader to help them in their fight against Rome...

You see, most people in Jesus day were not coming to him looking for salvation...

Most were coming to him with selfish needs...

Even more sadly, nothing has changed in 2000 years because most people,- just like these 10 people with leprosy, only come out to see Jesus in order to see what they can get out of him....

So whether it is 10 men on the outskirts of a village or 10 people in the pews at church, most come to see Jesus but only to see what kind of handout He is offering...

In a real sense, these 10 men with leprosy are an all too common picture of those who come out to meet Jesus..

And notice what they say in verse 13..

13 and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Let me give a quick review of leprosy just to remind us of the horrors of this disease...

Leprosy is a general word to describe a number of skin diseases....

Some are not very severe, while others are very severe...

The kind spoken of here and in much of the Bible is the most severe kind...

The OT is filled with warnings and instructions about leprosy because it is highly contagious..

In fact, whole villages and towns could be wiped out due to the spread of it...

Therefore, God established detailed procedures for dealings with lepers...

They were removed from the general population and forced to live together in their own communities of lepers...

(Which, by the way, explains why 10 lepers would be hanging out together on the outskirts of town)

And if you ever claimed to be healed from the disease, it still took much time to ever become a part of the normal population again...

So lepers were outcasts in a very real sense of Jewish life...

They were to be avoided at all costs...

And to add to their shame, lepers were not too pleasing to look at...

The source of their illness was a bacteria that essentially killed the pain receptors in their bodies..

Now any of you like me who don't like pain at all would think this would be a good thing....

But it wasn't...

And the reason is simple, pain receptors help us stop doing the things that are causing us to be in pain...

For instance, if you touch a hot pan coming out of the stove, you drop it because the pain receptors in your hand tell your hand to let go of it...

Lepers did not have that wanting system...

So they could hold their hand in a fire and have no way of knowing it was there...

And though they had no pain in the hand, the fire melted and mangled the skin into a mess..

So lepers would often be mangled messes of people because the bacteria would spread all over the body in white patches that destroyed other parts of the body as well...

Therefore, lepers were social outcasts because of their disease but they were also physical outcasts due to their unpleasant appearances...

Now Jesus has already healed lepers by this point in the book of Luke..

Back in Luke 5, Jesus even touched a leper to cleanse him...

And so word is out that Jesus is a leper healer...

So when he gets close to this village, these 10 men meet him and according to verse 13, they raise their voices saying...

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

Now, this is a most inserting request...

Not in the sense of what they are asking for, but in the sense of how they ask...

They call him “Master...”

Now, many people look at this and automatically assume that these must be believers....

In their minds, how could you call Jesus “master” but not be saved?

But that is very possible since many people even call him “Lord” and aren’t saved according to Matthew 7:21..

On top of that, we also know that these men aren’t saved by what happens later in the story....

However, what we need to understand is this...

Calling Jesus Lord and Master is no assurance that someone is saved....

People will do just about anything in hopes of getting Jesus to do what they want him to do for them...

Here, these men come out to meet Jesus and even call him “Master”, but it is all an act in hopes that he will heal them...

Sadly, many people say and do all sorts of things today in hopes that Jesus will help them but they are not saved and have interest in getting saved....

They only want what Jesus or his church is handing out...

Now all I want us to see in these verses is this....

True thanksgiving is a response to a rescue...

Now, one of these men is going to be an example of true thanksgiving...

And what need to see is that he has a real problem that requires rescue..

And leprosy was a real problem....

If you remember the story of the first American Thanksgiving, it was the response of the people to God who rescued them from a harsh reality of trying to make it in a new land...

They had a real trial and God gave real rescue, and real thanksgiving is the right response...

You see, no one can be truly thankful if they never see their need of rescue...

If you never see God's deliverance and provision in their life, it is impossible to be truly thankful...

That is why millions of people celebrated thanksgiving this weekend, but most were just thanking themselves instead of God...

If your worldview doesn't make room for God, you can't see God's goodness to provide for you and rescue you every day of your life...

The thankful leper had a real problem and that is the foundation for real thankfulness...

So, thanksgiving is a response to rescue....

But also,....

II. Thanksgiving Is a Recognition of Sovereignty **(14-16)**

So, we have 10 lepers lined up at the edge of town calling out for Jesus to heal their physical problem...

And you have to love the simplicity, the compassion, the mercy and the power of what we read in verse 14...

14 When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed.

Part of God's laws for dealing with lepers required the priests to declare a leper clean from his illness...

So Jesus told these 10 men to head to the priests even before they were clean...

Now this is a call to trust in his healing even before he heals them, so in some ways, this required these 10 men to act in faith...

And they did...

Now, this is saving faith, which we will see in a minute...

It is simply faith to trust in Jesus' words in regards to the healing of their disease...

And so they turn to head to the priest and Jesus heals them as they go...

Now, that is such a simply statement about an incredibly complex miracle...

10 men with a dreadful disease are cleaned of it in an instant by the sovereign power of Jesus Christ..

Jesus doesn't even speak a healing word here...

They leave and he wills the healing to occur...

And just like all of Jesus' acts of healing, the cure is immediate and complete and perfect...

That is a far cry from con artists like Benny Him who speak babbling words and people fall down and then get up limping...

Jesus never healed partially or over time.

He healed immediately and completely...

These people had the effects and scars of leprosy on their body and as they walked, they lost all trace of the disease and even the left behind evidence of it...

They were according to end of verse 14, "cleansed."

This is a miracle of the highest order described in the simplest of words....

But that is the power of God on display...

No need for lightning and thunder and an earthquake...

God simply wills a healing and it happens immediately...

So much for prayer cloths and healing oils and 1000s of dollars sent to false prophets in hopes of being....

Instead, when God heals he needs no magical devices or abracadabras..

He heals and he heals completely...

Verse 15...

15 Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, 16 and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

So 10 are healed.

9 continue on to the priest, and 1 heads back to God...

Now many people have a problem here..

Aren't those 9 doing what Jesus commanded?

And the answer is yes...

They are obeying since Jesus told them to go to the priests....

But realize this...

Sometimes, you can miss the forest for the trees....

Only one of the 10 realized what had just happened...

The other 9 were happy to be physically better, but they didn't realize that they were spiritually as sick as ever...

You see, they are healed physically but something else is going to come along in their lives and kill them eventually...

What the one realized is that the miracle did not occur to make them better physically but to reveal the one who could solve their spiritual problems....

At prayer meeting each Wednesday, we mainly pray for people's physical problems....

Over 3 plus years, I have prayed for hundreds of physical issues...

Cancer, heart trouble, injuries from accidents....

And I am glad to do that, but I never focus on the physical apart from the spiritual...

In a very real sense, these 10 men got leprosy in order to bring them to Jesus....

God afflicted their bodies, sent them out of their village to live as a group of sick men so that HE could send these men into the presence of Jesus on this day...

They had suffered physically in order to be brought before someone who could heal them spiritually...

But just many people today, they got well and forgot about the One who healed them...

And this is so easy to do...

Just think about the conversations that you have with a lot of people who are overly concerned about their physical health...

They will tell you about their doctor appointments, their medicine, their physicians, their tests....

And that is all well and good, but it shows our obsession with our physical well being over our spiritual well being at times....

Look, this body will die...

If cancer doesn't get me, heart disease will or my lungs will give out or something else will fail...

That is the nature of our bodies...

They are dying, but we can't be obsessed with them...

Our spiritual health is way more important because our spirits will outlast our bodies...

And this one leper understood that....

He wasn't blinded by his physical healing and headed to priest of God, instead he was thinking about his spiritual healing and headed back to the son of God...

You see, true thanksgiving is the result of seeing the sovereignty of God at work in my life....

When I see what God has done for me and acknowledge his power and sovereignty, then, and only then, can I be truly thankful....

All other thankfulness is simply a human response to what most people see as good luck...

So many people eat turkey and get together and never go to God with their thanksgiving...

Most people see thanksgiving as a time of being thankful for what they have physically and never give a thought to their spiritual condition...

This leper was better physically, but it didn't cause him to head back to his good life...

It caused him to seek out the one who could give him eternal life...

Now, the tragic reality is that he was all alone in headed back to Jesus....

Which leads to a third thanksgiving truth....

III. Thanksgiving is a Rarity in the World (17-18)

Verse 17...

17 Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? 18 [I]Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?”

As much as it may hurt our feelings to consider this, most people in the world are not really thankful to God in the way he desires....

Sure, people say they are thankful to God....

And people even act like they are thankful to God...

But the sad reality is that most people get on with their godless lifestyles after they get what they want from God....

10 of the lepers came to Jesus but only 1 stayed with Jesus...

10 of the lepers called him Master but only 1 truly meant it...

10 of the lepers had reason to be thankful but only 1 expressed that thankfulness in the right way...

This is the world in which we live...

People speak nice of God but they really don't want to have anything to do with Him...

People bow to give thanks to God but they really aren't interested in living for Him...

Look, thanksgiving is celebrated by millions but only really practiced by a small percentage of the people...

Biblical thanksgiving is not a celebration of what the Pilgrims did...

Biblical thanksgiving is a celebration of what God did and does for you everyday...

And unfortunately, very few people understand and acknowledge that....

One final thanksgiving truth is found in the final verse of this scene...

IV. Thanksgiving is a Reaction of the Truly Saved (19)

Verse 19...

19 And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith [m]has made you well.”

Dont miss what this verse is teaching or you may miss the whole point of the story..

Now, most translations lose the meaning of what Jesus here...

Because most translations simply read...

Your faith has made you well..

The word for “made you well” comes from the Greek root word “Sozo”...

You see, all the lepers were made well in a sense....

And in verse 14, we even read that all the lepers were cleansed....

The word used there is “katharizo”...

This is the word most commonly used for getting better after a sickness like leprosy...

“They were cleansed.”

In other words, all 10 got better like we would say after we get over a cold...

But that is not the word that Jesus uses at the end of verse 19....

He is not telling this thankful leper that his faith has made him well (KATHARIZO)...

Instead, he says your faith has made you well (SOZO)..

And SOZO is different from KATHARIZO...

SOZO is the root word from which we get the word Savior...

In other words, this one leper has not just been healed physically (KATHARIZO), he has been healed spiritually (SOZO) as well...

Now, what separates this leper from the other 9?

He has expressed his thankfulness to God...

In other words, thankfulness to God is evidence of true salvation...

When that leper turned back to Christ, he was a picture of true salvation...

You see, saved people don't just come to Christ for what they can get and then move on...

Saved people come to Christ, get what they need, and never leave His side while constantly thanking Him for what he has done...

Thankfulness to God is a natural reaction of the truly saved...

And in this case of the 10 lepers, it was an immediate reaction of the one who got saved...

Now listen very carefully....

People can be thankful and not be saved....

In fact, I am sure there are plenty of people who are thankful in the world and they may express that thanksgiving to God...

But be thankful to Him is not a sign that they are saved...

Some people come to church and that doesn't mean they are saved...

So we have to be careful here not to assign salvation to everyone who says “Thank you God..”

But I do want to say this....

Everyone who is truly saved is always truly thankful to the Lord...

Conclusion

I entitled this..

A New Testament Thanksgiving...

And I think this is a better picture of Thanksgiving than the pilgrims and Indians sitting around a table in Massachusetts in the 1600s...

You see, it is good to get together and eat and enjoy fellowship with people we love..

I look forward to Thanksgiving each year myself...

And we had a good time with family over the past week in honor of Thanksgiving...

But you can't miss the picture of a NT thanksgiving here in this leper and Christ...

There is no turkey and no cranberry sauce..

There is no family gathering here..

There are no cars in the driveway and kids playing the yard...

There is simply a man who has been saved sitting at the feet of Christ offering thanks to Him from his heart...

Friends, that is the picture of thanksgiving that we must never forget...

Long before there were road trips and dressing and gravy and aunts pinching your cheeks, there was a leper who was better coming to Christ with thanksgiving in his heart and nothing else...

That my friends is a picture of thanksgiving from the word of God...

And it didn't happen one day of the year on the 4th Thursday of November...

It simply was the condition of the heart of man who saw the source of his rescue from the effects of leprosy and came to him to acknowledge his power and left with a ticket to heaven....

And you know what?

We will see that leper in heaven one day if we are saved, and we will spend an eternity with him thanking God for all he has done for us..

Let us pray...