

“One Out of Ten”
November 24, 2019

This week we have Thanksgiving. For us living in the States it is a special week. In Japan, the New Year’s festivities known as Shogatsu is an important national holiday, but in the States the New Year’s doesn’t seem to get as much attention. In Japan, Christmas is not an official holiday so people go to work as usual, but here in the States most people have the day off.

Christmas is a special holiday in America, and Thanksgiving is also an important day for Americans. Both of these holidays are related to God. On Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

I think most of you know the origin of Thanksgiving so there’s no need for me to explain. The central purpose of Thanksgiving is to give thanks to God. So this morning I would like us to think about what it means to give thanks to God as we learn from the Bible. Let us read from Luke 17:11-19.

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

Here it says that “Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee”. Why did the writer record this detail? The reason behind this was that the regions of Samaria and Galilee had a unique relationship with each other, and this relationship is the key to understanding the significance of the event recorded here.

Samaria was once the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, but after the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria in the year BC 721, the Assyrians began occupying the region. The Jews who were already living in the land and the occupying Assyrians intermarried and their children came to be known as the Samaritans.

The Jews highly valued the purity of their bloodline so they saw the Samaritans to be defiling the Jewish race and persecuted the Samaritans. On top of that the Samaritans began practicing a

religion that was influenced by the Assyrians and this deepened the divide between the Jews and the Samaritans even more.

So as you can imagine, there was a lot of tension at the border between Galilee and Samaria, but Jesus chose to travel along this border, and it was in a village near this border that He met those ten lepers.

During that time, people with leprosy were considered unclean. In Leviticus 13:45-46 it says “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”. As we can tell from this passage, a person with leprosy could not have a normal social life, but had to live secluded from the rest of society. This is why they didn’t go near Jesus but stood at a distance and called out to Him in a loud voice.

And as we can tell from Jesus’ words, those ten men included both Jews and Samaritans.

Racial and religious differences prevented the Jews and Samaritans from interacting with each other, but those Jewish and Samaritan lepers had to live together because of their common condition.

Even today, there are deep-rooted religious and racial conflicts around the world. But whether you’re Muslim or Christian, you will become sick. Whether we’re American or Iranian, we all feel the same kind of emotions when a child is born or a person dies.

Those ten men were brought together by their illness. And together they called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

Earlier in the book of Luke (Luke 5:12-15), we see that Jesus had already healed a man with leprosy before, and those ten men must have heard about it.

They knew that if Jesus were to pass them by without stopping, they will have to live the rest of their lives with their illness. They knew this was the chance of a lifetime, so they didn’t mumble, but they cried out to Him with all their strength.

Jesus heard the cries of those ten men, and it says that when He saw them He said to them “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

In those days, when a person was healed from a skin disease, they needed to be inspected and approved by the priests. By this they were able to reintegrate into society.

And it says that as the ten men were on their way to the priests they were all healed. The Bible doesn't give us the details on how they were healed. Luke, who recorded this event, was a physician. A physician usually would not record as fact something that is medically impossible.

But Luke recorded this healing. Why? There's only one reason. Because it actually happened. Even if it could not be medically explained, as a physician, Luke had to record this healing because it actually occurred.

We can imagine how happy those ten men must have been when they were healed. Their illness was the one thing in life they wish they could be freed from.

And they were freed from that one thing as they were on their way to the priests. They no longer needed to cry out to others that they were unclean, and were now able to freely go to crowded places and go home to their families.

For those ten men, the moment they were healed must have been the happiest moment of their lives.

But the Bible tells us that only one of them, a Samaritan, came back to thank Jesus. He came back praising God in a loud voice and threw himself at Jesus' feet to thank Him.

There is an important truth found in this account. Each one of those ten men experienced the greatest joy of their lifetime. Not by their own effort, but only by the power and grace of Jesus Christ. Without Jesus' help, their lifelong prayer of being healed wouldn't have been answered.

But it says that after they were healed, they forgot to thank Jesus and only one of them came back to Him. Their greatest wish just came true but only one out of ten of them gave thanks to God. We must all reflect on ourselves and ask, "How thankful am I?"

When they saw Jesus, "they called out in a loud voice" asking Him to heal their disease.

In the same way, we too call out when we are in need. We call out when we have a prayer request and say to others "please pray for me". We call out to God in prayer, sometimes with tears, sometimes with fasting. But what do we do when that prayer is answered?

The Samaritan came back to Jesus "praising God in a loud voice". We call out to Jesus with a loud voice when we are in need, so when our prayer is heard, shouldn't we praise Him and give thanks even louder?

The English word "thank" is very similar to another word. That word is the word "think". It is said that the word "thank" was derived from and has the same root as the word "think". We must first think before we can give thanks. Gratitude toward God only comes by thinking about what He has done for us.

John says in 1 John 3:1 "See [think about] what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him".

The greatest thing we as Christians should be thankful for is that we have been made a child of God. And we must think about the greatness of His love for us which made this possible, a love so great that He would give us His only Son Jesus to die in our place.

Don't just give it a quick thought, but take the time to really think about what He has done for us. If we don't take the time to think, we would soon forget about the great price Jesus paid for us on that cross, and pass Him by without ever stopping to thank Him.

Nine out of ten of those men left without returning to thank Him, that means 90 percent of them were not thankful, so it is very probable that we too are living each day without ever thinking about what God has done for us, and therefore without ever stopping to thank Him.

Why do you think the only one to return to thank Jesus was the Samaritan? It is because he was the only one who truly knew how much God loved him. He took the time to think about the great love he received.

As we saw earlier this man was not considered a member of the Jewish race. In those days, he was viewed as someone who was excluded from God's promise. So it would have been socially acceptable for Jesus, a Jew, to treat this man differently for being a Samaritan.

If Jesus would have said "Sorry, you're a Samaritan so I can't help you", the man had no choice but to accept it.

As he began walking to go to the priests, he may have been feeling nervous, wondering if Jesus would stop him and say "hey, not you, you're a Samaritan". But Jesus did not stop him, and along with the other nine, he was healed on the way to the priests.

On the way, he may have thought to himself, "Maybe I won't be healed because I'm a Samaritan". But as he was walking, he noticed the skin lesions on his hands and feet have been completely healed. His once dry, damaged skin is now smooth as a baby.

After the healing, he must have said to himself, "Even though I am a Samaritan, God chose to heal me. How great is His love and compassion for me!"

How happy this man must have been. He was so happy that he turned back on his way to the priests to go back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice on the way, and he threw himself at Jesus' feet to thank Him.

He knew the kind of person he really was, so he couldn't leave without giving thanks for this grace that was poured out even for a person like him.

After this Jesus said to the man, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (v.19).

When Jesus said "your faith has made you well", He was not just referring to the faith that it took the ten lepers to go show themselves to the priests.

That too is faith, but here Jesus is commending the faith of this Samaritan, who came back to thank Jesus before even going to the priests or to his family, because he was deeply moved by the love of God who chose to heal him.

When Jesus said to the Samaritan "your faith has made you well", he was not only made well physically, but he was healed spiritually as well.

Faith is not just to believe that God will solve our problems. But we tend to only focus on getting our problems solved. But when we give thanks to God when a problem is solved, that too is faith.

The other nine men were also healed of their leprosy. But the Samaritan returned to Jesus to thank Him, and by this he was spiritually healed, in other words his soul was saved. And this salvation he received was worth far more than the healing of his body.

When Jesus saw the Samaritan He asked him "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" (v. 17, 18)

From these words we can tell that Jesus hoped to see the other nine men return and give praise to God as well. By this we know God's heart for us; He wants us to give thanks from our hearts and praise Him with a loud voice, and He is delighted when we do so.

And just as the Samaritan received spiritual salvation after giving thanks for his physical healing, we too will receive a greater blessing when we give thanks and praise God for what He has already done for us.

So as we approach Thanksgiving Day, let us take the time to reflect on God's grace and how good He has been to us. And let us give thanks for all that He has done for us.

Let us not only cry out to Him when we are in need, but let us shout to Him in praise and thank Him for answering us in our times of need. Let's pray.