

The origin of a grateful heart

Luke 17:11-19

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In Luke 17:11-19 we find this story of Jesus and the 10 lepers:

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem he (Jesus) was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

With which of these lepers can you best relate? The one who was so appreciative that His need had been met, or the ones who received the gift and just went on their merry way? Most of us can relate to both. At times we are thankful, and at other times giving thanks does not even come to mind. We only speculate about the reasons that the other 9 lepers did not return to thank Jesus, but we find in this one Samaritan this equation: Great Need + Great Gift = Great Gratitude.

We are called to be thankful, but this is not our natural response. A lack of gratitude was first seen in the garden of Eden, back in Genesis 3. God had given Adam and Eve everything, and yet they were not grateful. They still wanted more, and because of this they chose to disobey and eat the forbidden fruit. We, too, are often guilty of discontentment and lacking gratitude.

Today's culture makes it even worse. The media takes that root of sinfulness and selfishness that is found in mankind and seeks to amplify our sense of entitlement. It convinces us that we have the right to an easier life, a more comfortable existence, a more respected position. That we deserve better. Its

message imbeds in us a heart of complaining and discontentment. It pits us against each other with a sense of competition, comparison and covetousness.

For many this pandemic has made being thankful even more difficult. When we are used to always wanting more, it is quite an abrupt change when things begin to be taken away from us, like has been done during this pandemic. When we lose freedom to go where we want. When we lose the finances, the opportunities and the pleasures to which we are accustomed, then we are tempted to put away gratitude, and instead, focus on complaining, discontentment, feeling sorry for ourselves, or even questioning God because things are not going the way that we want. These have been difficult days, but the Apostle Paul gives us another option.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 he said, ***“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*** Some may say, “That is easy for him to say, because he hasn’t gone through our situation.” That is correct, he has not gone through our situation, but Paul knew his own share of trials and tribulations. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 tells us that for the sake of the gospel Paul had been in prison, exposed to death multiple times, shipwrecked, beaten, whipped, stoned, in danger from thieves, in danger from rivers, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, had gone without sleep, and even gone without food. Yet somehow he was able to give thanks in all circumstances.

The question now becomes, was being thankful in all circumstances just an ability that God gave Paul, or is it really possible for us as well?

Paul is not telling us to ignore our pain when He instructs us to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). He is just giving us perspective. He is helping us see the reality of our trials in the midst of God’s working and against the backdrop of eternal life. Yes, there will be pain and trials and suffering, but God is always working, in and through us. And best of all, there will come a day when all of this will pass away and we will enter into our eternal home, into the presence of God. That is the reason for Great Gratitude.

So, what was Paul’s secret? The gospel. Paul had been an enemy of God, even to the point of persecuting Christ’s followers. If Paul had continued on this path, his penalty would have been eternal death, separated from God forever. Paul had been a chief of sinners, yet Jesus called to Paul, forgave him, and gave him eternal life. Once again we see the equation of Great Need + Great Gift = Great Gratitude.

As believers, the difference between a thankful heart and an unthankful heart can often be traced back to how we view the gospel. It is a matter of the heart. We can see it more clearly in other writings of the Apostle Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 4:15 Paul wrote these words, ***“For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.”*** The Gospel was spreading, and more and more people were finding salvation in Jesus Christ. The natural result was an increase of gratitude that gave glory to God for what He had done for them through Christ. It was the ultimate example of the equation that was presented earlier: Great Need + Great Gift = Great Gratitude.

Romans 6:23 helps us understand the idea better. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* In this one verse we find a summary of the entire gospel. We all have sinned against a holy God (Romans 3:23). Because of this, His wrath was upon us and we were supposed to be separated from God forever, an eternal death in hell. *“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). Christ took upon Himself our sins, dying in our place. The penalty for sin has been paid. Because of this, all who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ will be saved.

This is the ultimate example of Great Need + Great Gift that should result in an ongoing, continuous sense of Great Gratitude. Let’s think about it: We all have sinned. Our Great Need was eternal death because of our sin. Our Great Gift was eternal life that was made possible through sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must realize that anything that is better than eternal death is a gift. Anything more than eternal death is more than we deserve.

As children of God we should live in this position of spiritual humility and indebtedness for God’s grace for the rest of our lives. We should also have a sense of gratitude that is untouchable. A sense of gratitude that permeates every area of our lives. Let’s consider it like this:

Imagine that you are terminally ill. You have tried all your options, doctors, hospitals, health foods, experimental drugs, and natural treatments. The only cure is a rare medicine that costs 20 million euros. You don’t have that kind of money. The amount of money needed is astronomical. It is impossible. So, you accept the fact that you are going to die. You prepare yourself spiritually. You begin to get your finances in order. You say your goodbyes to family and friends. And then one day, while you are eating breakfast, the doorbell rings. Startled, you answer the door and there stands a deliveryman who has a certified envelope for you. Inside you find a short note from the sender of the package, expressing his love for you during this time of need. The envelope also contains a letter from the hospital, certifying that this person has paid in full the 20 million euros for the treatment, and all you need to do is contact the hospital to set the dates for your appointments to begin. An overwhelming sense of gratitude in your heart takes over. Imagine later that day your dishwasher breaks, or your phone dies or you lock yourself out of your apartment, or your video game controllers quit working. Those all are frustrating events, but in the midst of the 20 million euro medical treatment that is going to save your life, those inconveniences no longer rob you of your great sense of gratitude.

In the same way, the good news of being given eternal life, when we deserved eternal death, should result in a mindset that realizes that from this point on everything is a gift. We don’t deserve the breath we just breathed, the job we just lost, the hospital we stay in when we are sick, the laptop that broke, the coffee that spilt, the children who misbehave, the opportunity to take the test that we failed, the marriage that is difficult sometimes, much less anything else that we receive in this life. Because of this, everything in life is an added bonus and a blessing. It births a heart of thanksgiving even in the midst of the challenges of life. Gratitude should be our default perspective of life.

Great Need + Great Gift is to result in Great Gratitude, but does it? And if not, why not?

Great gratitude is stymied if we believe a grace-centered gospel that does not tell of our desperate need for forgiveness and only highlights the blessings that God gives to His children. This grace-centered gospel only nurtures one's sense of entitlement and self-serving desires. We can also misunderstand the Good News of Jesus Christ by only focusing on the sin-centered gospel. In this case, it is a guilt-centered perspective of religion that focuses on hopeless sin and shame, but no grace. A God-centered gospel communicates both the utter lostness of man and the immense grace of Christ. The good news only produces endless gratitude once we realize the depth of the bad news. Great Need drives us to God's Great Gift that results in Great Gratitude.

As we remain near Christ, we are taken time and again to the truths of the cross. The extent of our gratitude will be in direct relationship to the daily, moment by moment, remembering of the desperation of our need and the complete, undeserved deliverance that has been found in Christ.

If one does not know Christ, or if a believer has drawn away from Christ, the opposite will occur. Spiritual humility which comes from remembering one's sinfulness and God's grace will be replaced by a sense of self-righteousness or entitlement. "I deserve better!" The focus goes from what God has done to what man can do. It will go from pleasing God to pleasing self. From humility to pride. We will think more about the present than eternity. We will be desensitized to our sin and begin to think more highly of ourselves than we ought.

It will result in a self-centered life that is characterized by discontentment, complaining and covetousness. We will worry about people's opinions. We will be easily offended when people don't meet our "needs" the way we want. We will be insecure in who we are. At times, it will even lead to addictive behaviors that try to feel the void in our lives that can only be filled by Christ. Thankfulness is thwarted by discontentment.

When we forget the gospel we are likely to lose our sense of continuous gratitude. We will complain about our immediate difficulties and forget the ongoing, eternal umbrella of blessing under which we live.

Now that we have been made aware of these teachings on Great Need, Great Gift and Great Gratitude, how do we transfer these truths from our minds to our hearts?

We must foster gratitude in our own lives and the lives of our children. In the beginning it is a discipline or a duty that grows into a habitual way of life and condition of the heart. Pray for a heart of gratitude. Teach the gospel to your children. Preach the gospel to yourself. Teach your children to give thanks to God in prayer. Discipline yourself to give thanks. Take time to reflect and even journal on what God has done for you and how He is providing for you in the present. Become aware of the needs of the less fortunate. Give to others in need. Remind yourself of what God has done, and share your "God stories" with each other. As seen in Psalm 145:4, ***"One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."*** May we intentionally remember the blessings of God and be thankful.

In the midst of pain, may we thank Him for His grace that is sufficient. In the midst of trials, may we thank Him that He works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His

purpose. In the midst of weakness, may we thank Him for His strength that will carry us. In the midst of poverty, may we thank Him for His promise to provide for our needs as we seek Him first. In the midst of challenge, may we be confident that we are being made like Jesus. In the midst of a world that is plagued by sickness and conflict, may we thank him for an eternity where *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore.”* (Revelation 21:4)

Allow these following verses to minister to you as we each seek to have a heart of gratitude:

- *“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”* (Ps. 100:4-5)
- *“Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.”* (Col. 2:7)
- *“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”* (Col. 3:15)
- *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.”* (Ps. 103:1-5)
- *“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”* (1 Thess. 5:18)
- *“Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”* (2 Cor. 9:15)
- *“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!”* (Ps. 107:1)

Discussion questions:

- 1) What did you find interesting in this sermon?
- 2) What is something in your life that you are most thankful for?
- 3) How would you explain “Great Need + Great Gift = Great Gratitude” in your own words?
- 4) How should the gospel affect our sense of gratitude in our daily lives?
- 5) What do you think God wants you to remember from this sermon?
- 6) How can you apply this sermon to your life?
- 7) How can we pray for you?