

One Thankful Person
Luke 17:11-19
Bellevue Baptist Church
August 30, 2026 (Family Worship Sunday)

The fall is approaching and how happy we will be when this blistering heat gives way to brisk mornings, jeans and sweatshirts, and falling leaves. As the weather changes, the wonderful feeling that the holidays are right around the corner emerges also. Thanksgiving, of course comes first. Since today is Family Worship Sunday, I felt the Lord leading me to preach a message on this subject of giving thanks.

Abraham Lincoln was the president who declared Thanksgiving as a Federal Holiday, setting aside one day per year for the purpose of being grateful. This is something we Americans look forward to, but the Bible says that, in a way, every day should be Thanksgiving. Every morning, we should rise saying: "praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Today, on this Family Worship Sunday, I want us to look at a passage of Scripture that reminds us of that—the importance of gratitude.

One summer, when our son Max was just a boy, he started a lawn-mowing business, and as he was just beginning, I enjoyed helping him with his lawns, giving him a few pointers, and running the weed whacker. One night, as I went to bed, I found this post-it note sitting by my alarm clock. It said...

Dear Dad: I love you. I thought you deserved some money for helping me mow all of my lawns. Thanks for that. —Max

Now I spent the \$20. I earned it. But I kept that note for several years. I kept it in my desk as a reminder to myself that a child's expression of gratitude moves the heart of the Father. When a kid says to a parent, "Thanks for that," something special happens. Gratitude causes two hearts to grow together.

Even today, a decade later, when I look at that note, I am reminded of how my father in heaven smiles every time I look at my life and say, "Thanks for that."

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Psalm 103:2

How quickly we forget His benefits—all the good things He drops into our lives! How seldom we stop and say, "Thanks for that!"

Today, as we look at this remarkable story in Luke 17, we meet a very sick man who is healed by Jesus. He and nine others are given the gift of good health, but this one returned to say thanks. Let's see what the Lord might say to us here...

Luke 17:11+...

On the way to Jerusalem 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 that man, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.” Lk 17:11–19

Now, first of all, this story makes no sense whatsoever without some basic understanding of leprosy.

In biblical times, leprosy was a huge problem that terrified people. It was an infectious skin disease that would force a person to have to live in isolation. They were not allowed to go to the temple for worship. They were declared unclean.

In the Old Testament, God had put laws in place for the Jews to remain holy and set apart. They were told to be careful what they went near. For example, they could not touch a dead person. If a man fell into a well and died, and his Jewish brother had to lift his body out, that brother knew the price of the contact. He could not go to the temple and worship for a set period of time. This idea of remaining ceremonially clean was deeply engrained in the Jews.

So when it came to people who contracted leprosy, poor people were cut off from society, often living in grave yards and remote places.

But Jesus does what he always does—he moves toward the broken, the hurting, the suffering. He takes an interest in the outcasts. Everywhere he went, he gave his time to the unimportant people. He looked eyes with people who never received a glance.

Have you noticed the punishment for prisoners in maximum security prisons? If they break a rule, they head to isolation. There is something worse than being caged for life—being caged alone, with no interaction with other people. Loneliness kills the human soul. We need other people in our lives.

So this gives you some background on the state of mind these ten lepers were in. They had been forced to leave their families and their friends, unless a priest saw they were healed, and officially declared them clean.

And the Word says in v. 12....

¹² as Jesus 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.”

These men were like stranded sailors in the ocean, floating on a rubber raft, when a ship finally comes by. “Help! Have mercy on us!” they said to Jesus. They were desperate, and apparently, news had spread that this miracle worker named Jesus might headed their way.

You may remember in the Beatitudes, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” What that means is—from a spiritual perspective, those who have run out of their own power are more likely to seek after God’s power. These men look dreadful, but they are in a prime position to experience salvation.

They have no reputation to uphold. They have no trendy clothes on their bodies. They have no friends in high places that can help them. All they have is some hope in Jesus. A person poor in spirit has an obvious need for help.

There is a true story about a young man named Aron Ralston who made a mountain bike trip to Moab, Utah, and found himself in a horrific situation. As he was hopping along the huge rocks of the Canyonlands, he and his bike plunged down into a crevice. He fell into a hole, and a boulder came loose, landing on his arm and pinning him against the wall.

Aron Ralston was stuck. To make matters worse, he had told no one where he was going and there was little chance he would be found. For several days, he stood there, sizing up the situation. And as he tells his story, he reached a point where completely lost control of his emotions.

Into his video camera, he confessed that his personal life has been a picture of self-reliance, self-focus, and isolating himself from his family. He had, for many years, pretend to be his own god, living as if he needed no one. With the reality of death before him, he looked into the camera and said: "All of my life, I knew this rock was coming."

The rock represented the immovable thing. The thing he couldn't fix. The challenge he couldn't meet by his own self-will.

And Scripture warns all of us of this truth—that there is coming a day when all the godless people on Earth say, "I tried to live alone, and it didn't work. I pretended I needed no help. It wasn't true."

Scripture says that on the last day, countless people will confess they saw no need for God. They saw no need for the cross of Christ. But, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said, "for they recognize their need for mercy!"

Over the years, as a pastor, I've seen many rocks fall on the arms of people. Something scary or sad happened, that changed the way they lived.

- An unwanted divorce. The sudden loss of a marriage is crushing. It will humble a person to the core, and challenge them to seek the help of God and others.
- An unwanted diagnosis from the doctor. I've seen people who could pose on the front page of Fitness magazine suddenly discover they are very sick. And life going forward will look entirely different. Loss of health will humble a person.
- An unforeseen firing. To be let go from the company you poured your life into, and all of a sudden, your career is not a safe place to park your identity. This can cause a person to reconsider the source of their significance.

Why does James say:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2–4

God can use these big heavy things that fall on us, to get us to the place where we call out: Jesus, have mercy on me.

Aron Ralston would come out of that hole, but he lives today without his right arm. I am certain that there is someone in this room who feels like Aron Ralston—something really hard happened, and your life changed. You live with a new reality. James says that though you would never choose this situation, the Lord can use this like nothing before to make you spiritually powerful, and useful to Him.

And those 10 men in Samaria—they were all there. A large rock called leprosy had fallen upon them. There were no earthly remedies. They could not return to the life they once had. So they cried out these six powerful words: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

And the way that Jesus responds is unexpected:

When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

But the sick men must have assumed Jesus was a lunatic. They looked at their skin and they saw no change. Their arms, still covered with boils and blisters. A few of them, perhaps, were still missing fingers, or toes—their extremities ravaged by the disease. And yet, Jesus wants them to start walking toward the priest, as if they have a clean bill of health.

What is he up to? In other places, he healed people in an instant. Perhaps those men had heard those stories, and hoped for the same treatment. Why would Jesus require them to believe in something before it came to pass? The book of Hebrews says that faith is the substance of things unseen. It's being sure of something we hope for.

When Jesus rose from the dead, it was scientific Thomas, who declared, “I will not believe anything until it is proven with my eye.” He was an empiricist. He went and touched the holes in the body of Jesus and Jesus said, “because you have seen me, you believe. But blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Jesus puts a faith test before these ten men, to see if they will take him at his word, to find out if they will trust before they have tangible results.

And all ten of these men pass the initial test. They all start walking. And once they started walking, suddenly it happened.

I wish we had the YouTube video on this. Can you imagine how it went? The first guy looks over, and with eyes the size of the moon, and says, “Bert, your nose. It's back.” And Bert says, “Joe, your face, it's smooth as glass.” And right there on the side of the road, ten new births take place—life comes back to them. The snow has melted in Narnia, and the curse is no more. They must have danced in the street.

And 9 of them realized, at that moment, that the only thing keeping them from a full return to their families was a simple signature from the priest. Nine men took off in a dead sprint. I'll bet those men would have beaten Olympic race times. Their bodies full of unbridled energy.

But there was this one that started running and suddenly stopped. It occurred to him, to him only, that he should say, “Thanks for this.” He realized that this Jesus was the Son of God, that

his family and friends could wait while he looked into His Savior's eyes, forgetting not this benefit.

And so he makes an about-face, letting his friends leave him in their dust.

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.

What does his country-of-origin have to do with anything? Why are we told that he was from Samaria, and not Jerusalem? To get to the answer, you have to keep reading the book, and you will discover that Jesus' toughest crowd were those from his own bloodline. After Luke, comes the Gospel of John. John tells us in chapter 1, *"that he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive. Yet to all who received him, to those who were called by his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God."*

Luke is writing this story down well after Jesus has risen from the grave and ascended into heaven. Luke is writing this story down in the time when the Jews were resisting the spread of the Gospel and fighting against the Holy Spirit's movement to expand the church to the Gentiles. Luke's next book called Acts will tell all about the mercy of Jesus going way out of bounds, reaching people of all types. And the Jews were not quick to receive these Samaritan types into their spiritual family.

Jews didn't like Samaritans, but Jesus doesn't care about the color of a person's skin, or what country they came from. He's looking for people who are hungry for God, and when they taste and see that the Lord is good, they say, "Thanks for that." And he was always surprised by the number of ungrateful people he found. V.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 that man, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

But wait! All ten of those men were made well. Every single one was healed of skin disease, so why does Jesus say to this man, "Your faith has made you well?" Jesus is suggesting that his faith has brought a deeper healing?

He's talking about the power of salvation, which is available to all, but rejected by most. This lowly Samaritan bowed down to Jesus, and gave credit where the credit was due.

In his excellent commentary on Luke, Kent Hughes writes:

One of the scarcest virtues of the human race is gratitude. Consider the typical Ivy League sophomore. From birth he has lacked nothing. He has had loving, doting parents and grandparents, the best in medical care, music lessons, tennis lessons, family vacations, summer sailing school, trendy wardrobes, religious instruction, European educational experiences, special work experiences, distinctive cars, credit cards.

...Yet he is an angry, ungrateful, depressed "poor me." He appreciates nothing. He regards his family as a nuisance. He focuses on shortcomings and slights in his upbringing, holding on to grudges with a death-grip. It never occurs to him that some of his happy friends have had it rougher than he. --Kent Hughes

It would be unfair to assume all wealthy kids at Ivy Schools are resentful and ungrateful. That's not true, but it is certainly true that when we get everything we want in life, and we never know what it's like to go without—it's hard to be thankful for the blessings.

All through the Bible, we are warned that an ungrateful spirit is the evidence of a cold heart toward God.

In the book of Romans, for example, Paul has a passage where he describes what a depraved culture looks like. Here are some signs that people have left God behind. Romans 1...

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him..." Romans 1:21

The heart of a creature has grown cold when it refuses to give thanks to the Creator. 2 Timothy 2 says that ingratitude is one of the signs of the end times.

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful." 2 Timothy 3:1, 2

Notice the marks of the end times, when the world is losing its mind. There's a list of ungodly behaviors, culminating in entitlement.

Jesus said to that leper, "You sir are cut from a different cloth. Your faith has gone to a deeper place. It is not just well with your body. "It is well with your soul."

Gratitude is a sign of a good soul.

Now just stop for a second and picture the faces of people who have helped you along life's way.

- The coach who believed in you and challenged you.
- The teacher who opened your eyes to truth.
- The grandparent who dialed into your life and cheered for you.
- The faithful mom who made your meals and folded your clothes and helped you with the school project.
- The devoted dad who taught you how to drive a car, and keep it between the lines.

That is gratitude on the horizontal plane. When you pause long enough to look at the people in your past, to remember how many have made your life better, this has a humbling effect on your heart.

But even more, Jesus is calling for the vertical dimension of praise. The early church set aside Sunday as Resurrection Day. There was no annual Easter celebration until a hundred years later. Every Sunday was Easter Sunday, as the believers came together to give thanks to God for all His benefits, including salvation by grace. It was by grace that they had been saved, and they did not dismiss that quickly.

When your children come into this room, and see you Mom, Dad, Grandpa, Grandma, lifting your voice in praise, you are teaching them one of the most important lessons of their lives, a

skill that will soothe their souls more than sports victory. A human being in praise of God is a happy human being.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good... Psalm 107:1

Over 20 years ago, I led a mission trip to Nicaragua. It was a medical and dental mission trip in one of the impoverished areas, and the poor would walk 5 miles with their little children to get a tooth pulled or to see a doctor. While those people waited, they sat in a tent, and I preached the message of Jesus to them. They paid attention, and some of them were more clearly moved by it all. One young man sat through a session, in the back row, and when time was over, he remained. He stayed for the next session and heard it all again. And when that was over, through a translator, I talked directly to him and he expressed a desire to follow Christ. The next day he came to see me and asked if I would walk down the road and baptize him in the river. I did. It was one of the neatest experiences of my life.

And on the day we were scheduled to leave, he approached me, and handed me a white card. When I flipped it over, I realized it was a photo. It was a picture of him. He said, "I don't have anything to give you, so I gave you a picture of myself. It's the only one I have."

When I reflect upon that story, I realize that even though this boy learned a great truth from me, I too learned a great truth from him. To be grateful is good and rare.

If you are here today, and you have received Christ into your life, he calls you to be baptized and go public with your faith, he calls you to partake of the Lord's Supper to declare you follow him, and he calls you to walk in humility and gratitude for all He has done.

If you are here today, and you are not yet a Christian, but like that young man in Nicaragua, you feel ready to make that decision, then you can respond to Jesus in faith today. You can accept Christ into your life, accepting what he did on the cross to cancel your sins and to give you new life. You are the only one that can make that decision for yourself. It's up to you.

Questions From the Kids

A Kid-Who-Likes-to-Ask-"Why" asks:

I can see why God wants me to say thanks for miracles and stuff, but why does God care if I thank Him for really small things?

In this story, the sick men should have thanked Jesus because He had given them a very BIG thing. He had healed their bodies. He gave them their lives back.

But what about the little things? Does God care if we thank Him for those?

Absolutely. In fact, one of the signs of a grateful heart is that you start noticing gifts that everybody else takes for granted.

Maybe you open your bag at McDonald's and discover they accidentally gave you an extra cheeseburger. "Thank you, Lord!" Maybe you wake up and school gets canceled because of snow. Maybe your favorite cereal is still in the pantry. Maybe you find five dollars in a coat pocket. Maybe your dog runs to meet you when you walk through the door. Maybe your mom makes your favorite dinner. Maybe somebody saves you a seat. Maybe the rain stops just before your soccer game. Maybe you look out the window and see an incredible sunset.

Those aren't leprosy-sized miracles. They're just little gifts scattered through an ordinary day.

In the Old Testament, there was a time when the people of God were living in tents in the wilderness. There were no grocery stores. No refrigerators. No McDonald's. Every day, they had to trust God to give them something to eat.

And every morning, God did. A strange, flaky food appeared on the ground called **manna**. Day after day, God fed them.

But eventually something happened. They got used to the miracle. What had once seemed like an amazing gift started to feel ordinary. They actually began complaining about the very food God was faithfully providing.

That happens to us too, doesn't it? We can get so used to having food in the pantry, a warm bed, people who love us, clothes to wear, and a thousand other gifts that we stop seeing them as gifts. That's one of the dangers of getting used to God's goodness: the things we once thanked Him for can become the things we barely notice.

A grateful person is someone who has learned to notice.

A Kid-Whose-Best-Friend-Just-Got-a-Motorcycle Asks: What should I do when somebody else has something I really want?

As you grow up, you'll start to discover something about stuff: getting something new can make you really happy, but usually only for a little while.

Think about a toy you once wanted so *badly*. Maybe it was a certain LEGO set, a baseball card, a video game, a new bike, or a pair of shoes. When you first got it, you played with it constantly. You couldn't stop looking at it. You might have even kept it beside your bed.

But where is it now? There's a pretty good chance it's in your closet. You still own it. You may even have good memories of it. But you hardly see it anymore. That's what happens with possessions. New things eventually become normal things.

And adults, we do the exact same thing. Our toys just get more expensive.

Oliver Burkeman, in his book *Four Thousand Weeks*, says that once people make enough money to meet their needs, they tend to invent new needs and aspire to new lifestyles. He puts it this way:

"It turns out that when people make enough money to meet their needs, they just find new things to need and new lifestyles to aspire to; they never quite manage to keep up with the Joneses, because whenever they're in danger of getting close, they nominate new and better Joneses with whom to try to keep up." Oliver Burkeman, *4000 Weeks*

That is why the Bible warns us about constantly wanting what that Jones family across the street has. Jesus said, "Life is not measured by how much you own." (Luke 12:15). More stuff does not equal more happiness.

So when your friend gets the bike you wanted, or the shoes you wanted, or the phone you wanted, remind yourself: That thing would be exciting for a while, but eventually it would become ordinary too. Then do something much better. Look around at what is already yours.

The happiest people aren't necessarily the people who have the most. They're the people who have learned to love what they already have.

A Kid-Who-Just-Got-Socks-from-His-Grandma asks:

If somebody gives me something I don't like, do I still have to be thankful?

I see your dilemma. One time my grandparents went to Hawaii, and they came back, and gave us each a strange green T-shirt that said in block letters, "Hang Loose, Hawaii."

I loved my grandmother. I did not love that T-shirt.

Even still, it's good to say thanks because when somebody gives you a gift, there are really two gifts. There is the thing they gave you, and there is the thought behind it. They were somewhere, they saw something, and they thought, *"I bet Ben would like that."* Now, maybe Ben already has five of them. Maybe they don't really understand what Ben likes. Maybe Ben opens the box and thinks, *What in the world am I going to do with this?*

But they thought of me. They spent their time or their money trying to show kindness to me. And kindness deserves gratitude.

So you don't have to pretend: *"This is the greatest thing I've ever received!"* But you can sincerely say, "Thank you for thinking of me. It was really kind of you to give me this." But there's another side to this. When you're the one giving the gift, be careful about expecting gratitude in return.

Maybe you spent hours picking out the perfect gift, and the person never sent a thank-you note. Maybe they barely reacted. Maybe you start thinking, *Well, I'm never giving them anything again!* That's when you have to remember: a gift isn't a trade. You didn't give them the gift so they would give you gratitude back. You gave because you wanted to bless them. A true gift doesn't come with strings attached.

So here's a good rule for both sides: When you receive, be quick to say thanks. When you give, be slow to expect it.