

"THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE"

**I. Introduction**

- A. Sinclair Ferguson tells a story that was related to him by a friend of his who is a leprosy surgeon in the far east.
1. On one occasion, this surgeon showed him a photograph of a leper upon whom he had operated and amputated a limb.
  2. Ferguson says that the thing that was so striking about the photo was the broad smile on the man's face.
  3. The reason for that smile was made clear when the surgeon told him the words that this leprous man had once spoken to him.
  4. The leper told the surgeon, "I am so glad I had leprosy. For unless I had had leprosy, I would never have met the Lord Jesus."
  5. That man had a clear understanding of what matters most in life.
  6. Even though he had lost a limb due to the disease that afflicted him, his heart was overflowing with gratitude because of the salvation that he had been granted in Jesus Christ.
- B. One of the most important virtues for Christians to cultivate is a heart that is overflowing with thankfulness.
1. The Puritan Thomas Watson explained why gratitude is so important when he said this: "it is a good thing to be thankful. It is good, because this is all the creature can do to lift up God's name; and it is good because it tends to make us good. The more thankful we are, the more holy. While we pay this tribute of praise, our stock of grace increases. In other debts, the more we pay, the less we have; but the more we pay this debt of thankfulness, the more grace we have." [*The Godly Man's Picture*, 135]

2. As we study this text from Luke's Gospel today, we will see how it stresses the vital importance of gratitude in the Christian life.

## II. The Request for Mercy

- A. The passage begins with Luke once again calling our attention to the fact that Jesus was fully aware that the path that lay ahead of him led to Jerusalem, the place where he would suffer and die.
  1. This does not mean that Jesus was directly en route to Jerusalem at this point.
  2. In fact, it would not make sense to say that, since the border between the regions of Galilee and Samaria ran east-west, and Jerusalem was to the south.
  3. Luke's point is simply that Jesus was conducting his ministry in these regions with the awareness that the time was drawing near for him to make that last, fateful trip to Jerusalem.
- B. Our text says that as Jesus entered a certain village in this region, he was met by a group of ten lepers.
  1. As the footnote in the ESV points out, the term "leprosy" was used in Bible times to refer to a wide array of skin diseases, not just what is known today as Hansen's disease.
  2. The ten lepers who met Jesus did not come up to him directly but cried out to him from a distance.
  3. They did this because of the Old Testament laws that placed severe restrictions on the level of contact that those suffering from such diseases could have with others.
  4. To a certain extent, lepers had to live as outcasts in Israelite society.
  5. While they were not to be cut off from the compassion of others, they did have to be physically cut off from others, even from their

own families.

6. This served as a vivid picture of how sin cuts people off from God's favorable presence.
7. We always need to remember this about sin.
8. The bulk of mankind have no sense of the misery of their sinful condition.
9. That is why they feel no need to cry out to God for mercy.
10. Even as believers, we have a tendency to forget just how weak and helpless we are in ourselves.
11. And when we are forgetful of this, we inevitably rely upon our own wisdom and strength, and we neglect prayer.

C. The lepers in our passage could not forget the misery of their condition.

1. They lived every day of their lives in physical distress.
2. They were relegated to the margins of society.
3. When they heard that this man who had performed so many miraculous healings was passing through their town, they got as close to him as they dared and they begged him to have mercy on them.
4. Notice that they were not making a demand of Jesus.
5. They were not saying that he owed it to them to heal them.
6. They were only appealing to Jesus to take pity upon them in their state of misery.
7. This is a picture of what takes place when the Spirit of God grants us faith to call upon the Lord and trust him to cleanse us of our

sins.

8. While we know that he does not owe us mercy, we humbly take hold of the mercy that he freely offers in the gospel.

### III. The Bestowal of Mercy

- A. Upon hearing this cry for mercy, Jesus responded in a different way than he did when he cleansed the leper back in chapter 5 of this Gospel.
  1. In that instance, the leper fell down before Jesus and said, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."
  2. And Jesus responded by stretching out his hand, touching the man, and saying, "I will; be clean."
  3. Then he instructed the man to show himself to the priest and make the appointed offering for his cleansing.
  4. In this text, Jesus does not touch the lepers but merely commands them to go and show themselves to the priests.
  5. And as they went on their way, they were miraculously healed.
  6. This demonstrated that Jesus's power to heal did not depend on his use of any particular technique.
  7. He could heal in any variety of ways, because he is the Son of God.
  8. In this case, he did not even make a declaration that they had been healed.
  9. He simply willed it, and it took place.
- B. One of the things to point out about this healing is that Jesus's instructions to these men were in full conformity to the Old Testament law.

1. This underscores what Jesus says elsewhere: he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.
  2. The law said that when a leprous person was healed, he had to go and show himself to the priest so that he could be declared clean.
  3. And when the priest made that declaration, the person who had been healed was to offer a sacrifice.
  4. Jesus sent these men to the priests to testify to his power to heal and to show that he was not in any way overturning the law in doing so.
- C. Another thing that we should note about this healing is that it took place as these men were obeying Jesus's command.
1. They did not complain or hang their heads in disappointment over the fact that Jesus did not immediately cleanse them right then and there, as he had done in the case of the leper in chapter 5.
  2. They simply did what Jesus said.
  3. In doing so, they were exhibiting a level of trust in Jesus's word.
  4. They were convinced that he had the power to heal them, and even though they did not understand what was going to happen, they followed Jesus's instructions.
  5. Now, this does not mean that all ten of them had saving faith in Jesus.
  6. They had a kind of faith, but Jesus's words at the end of the passage indicate that only one of them had true, saving faith.
  7. For this reason, John Calvin describes the faith of the nine as the "sparks of faith," or "temporary faith," or "transitory faith."

8. It lasted until they got what they wanted from Jesus, but then it faded away.
9. It did not last because it lacked a living root.
10. People still exhibit this kind of faith today.
11. It happens whenever people cry out to God for help in the midst of a crisis, and then, when the crisis passes, their faith passes away with it.

#### IV. The Response to Mercy

- A. Luke tells us that one of the lepers who was healed, upon realizing what had happened to him, turned back to express praise and thanks for what Jesus had done for him.
  1. The surprise here is that the only man who came back to give thanks to Jesus was a Samaritan.
  2. As we have noted before, the Samaritans were the mixed race that emerged in the northern region of Palestine after the northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.
  3. While the Samaritans had some Jewish ancestry, they ended up developing their own distorted version of the Jewish religion.
  4. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as unclean because of their impure blood and their impure theology.
  5. This explains Jesus response to this Samaritan man's actions.
  6. He says, "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"
  7. This seems to suggest that the other nine were Jews.

8. Yet it was the Samaritan, and only the Samaritan, who came back to praise God.
  9. The rest were certainly glad to be healed, but they got caught up in the excitement of being set free from their state of misery and being able to return to normal life.
  10. The fact that it was the Samaritan who responded in true faith reiterates an important theme in Luke's Gospel.
  11. Here is yet another picture of how Jesus was welcoming sinners and outcasts to himself.
- B. After pointing out that it was only the Samaritan who returned, Jesus then said to this man, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."
1. Actually, the translation that is given in the ESV footnote is the better option here.
  2. The footnote says, "your faith has saved you."
  3. The Greek word that Jesus uses in this verse can sometimes refer to a physical deliverance, the context strongly favors taking it in the spiritual sense here.
  4. It does not seem likely that Jesus would be referring to the man's physical healing at this point in the passage.
  5. After all, the other nine had also been "made well."
  6. The others also received physical healing from their leprosy, but their faith in Jesus was only superficial.
  7. Their failure to show gratitude revealed that their faith was only focused on getting what they wanted from Jesus.
  8. They were not really interested in who Jesus is, or in the implications that this had for how they should relate to him.

9. While all ten were “made well,” only the Samaritan was “saved.”
- C. In the case of the Samaritan, the healing of his leprosy was used by God to open his eyes to begin to see who Jesus really is.
1. This is made evident by the fact that he falls on his face before Jesus.
  2. This is a posture of worship.
  3. It testifies to Jesus’s identity as God.
  4. Consider how this detail compares to other passages where one person falls down on his face before another.
  5. When the centurion Cornelius fell down at Peter’s feet to worship him, Peter told Cornelius that this was not right.
  6. When the apostle John fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed him the visions in the book of Revelation, the angel rebuked him, saying, “You must not do that!”
  7. Yet when this Samaritan prostrated himself before Jesus, Jesus did nothing to dissuade him.
  8. Jesus accepted this man’s worship.
  9. He did so because he is God.
- D. Another indication of Jesus’s deity is seen in the fact that the Samaritan gave thanks to Jesus.
1. The Greek verb that is translated as “give thanks” here is *eucharisteo*.
  2. It is the same word that is used in the New Testament accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, where Jesus gives thanks for the bread and the wine.

3. More to the point, every time this verb is used in the New Testament, it is describing thanks that is being directed to God.
  4. This Samaritan may not have had all of his points of doctrine in perfect order at this point, but he knew enough to bow down before Jesus and to give thanks to him as God.
  5. As Jesus's words in verse 19 make clear, this man had saving faith in Jesus.
- E. We should also note that the Samaritan's faith was manifested by the gratitude that he had toward God.
1. It was his coming back to Jesus to offer praise and thanks that distinguished him from the nine other lepers.
  2. Their failure to give thanks showed that their faith was only temporary.
  3. But his gratitude showed that his faith was genuine.
  4. Gratitude is at the heart of the Christian life.
  5. As Christians, we have so much to be thankful for.
  6. Make sure that you are cultivating gratitude in your heart.
  7. Make a conscious effort every day, even on the bad days, even when you are under affliction, to express thanks to God.
  8. And make sure that you come to the assembly of God's people each Lord's Day to lift up your voice in grateful praise.

## V. Conclusion

- A. Gratitude does not come naturally to us.
1. We see this as we raise our children.

2. We have to train them to say 'Thank you.'
  3. One of the things that keeps us from being thankful is our sense of entitlement.
  4. We think that we deserve the good things that come to us.
  5. We take offense when we receive bad things instead.
- B. What we have to remember is that we do not really deserve anything good.
1. In ourselves we are all spiritual lepers.
  2. Our sin renders us unclean and cuts us off from the favorable presence of God.
  3. Yet in his grace the Lord Jesus humbled himself to the painful and shameful death of the cross, and he did so to atone for our sins and to secure our cleansing.
  4. We should heed Thomas Watson's counsel for how to cultivate gratitude in our hearts: "If you wish to be thankful, get a heart deeply humbled with the sense of your own vileness. A broken heart is the best pipe to sound forth God's praise. He who studies his sins wonders that he has anything and that God should shine on such a dunghill... Pride stops the current of gratitude. O Christian, think of your unworthiness; see yourself the least of saints and the chief of sinners, and then you will be thankful." [*The Godly Man's Picture*, 138]