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Jesus on Thanksgiving

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TEXT: Luke 17:11-19 (NIV)

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

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

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

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Well, how important is this idea of Thanksgiving and living with a grateful heart to us and to our creator? You know, before we look at a unique story in Christ's life about how he felt about Thanksgiving, I want to turn to Romans 1:18-20. When I was in high school, I heard a preacher preach on this passage and then he said a couple of things about it that have stuck with me ever since. The scripture says this:

The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress or push down or try to hide the truth by their wickedness. Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – his eternal power, his divine nature – have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

You know, the scripture basically says God's justice, his wrath, his anger is being revealed from Heaven against those who suppress the truth; try to cover up what's true and real and right. The scripture continues, saying, "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. And so, their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claim to be wise, they became fools." As I listened to that minister preach as a youngster sitting there in the pews, and he expounded on this passage about how God's passive wrath he backs up and lets people fall into their own self-destruction when they refuse to acknowledge him and glorify him or give thanks to him, I let it settle in on my spirit. And then he made this statement, he said: "All of our corruption as a nation and as individuals can be traced back to two things they're found in this passage here. They neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him." All of our corruption as a nation, as individuals can be traced back to two things. Number one, a refusal to acknowledge and glorify God for who he is, the creator, the sustainer, the all-powerful being; to give him the praise and honor and glory he deserves. When we don't do this and we drift away from him, then we refuse to give thanks to him for his goodness and his kindness to us. And our corruption begins when we refuse to acknowledge and glorify God for who he is. And then we refuse to give thanks to him.

My question for today in this first Sunday after Thanksgiving is: what is the level of gratitude in your heart today? The truth of the matter is, no matter what's happening in our lives, no matter what the circumstances are around us, there's always something to be thankful for. When Robinson Crusoe was wrecked on his lonely desert isle, he drew up two columns on a paper, one he called the evil, and on the other side, the good. He was cast on a desolate island, but he was still alive, not drowned, as all his shipmates were. He was divided for mankind and banished from human society. But he was not starving. He had no clothes. But he was in a hot climate where he didn't need them. He was without means to defend himself. But he saw no wild beasts, such as he had seen on the east coast of Africa. He had no soul to speak to. But God had sent the ship so near to the shore when it wrecked that he could get out all of the things necessary for

his wants. Robinson Crusoe concluded that there was not any condition in the world so miserable. But there was something negative in it. Also, though, something positive to be thankful for. Truly, there is really always something to be thankful for, and we often find what we're looking for in life. You know, if it's true that we head towards corruption when we refuse to acknowledge and glorify God for who he is, and then even refused to give thanks to him, we do well to continue to work, to cultivate a thankful heart. And Robinson Crusoe had it right when he was thinking on those things that are of good report, praiseworthy, so his heart could stay in gratitude for God. So his soul could stay wholeness and health before the Lord, and he could have a proper perspective on how God was providing for him and caring for him.

There's always something to be thankful for, and it is clearly God's will that you and I live as thankful people. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, in Paul's closing remarks to the believers and Thessalonica, he said this: "Be joyful always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." You know, some people often wonder what God's will is. He wants us to choose joy. He wants us to pray continually. He wants us to give thanks in all circumstances. This is his will for us. He wants to shape our attitudes and then our actions. He's constantly working to change us and transform us into the glorious image of his son, and we do well to pay attention to the attitudes of our hearts and the things we're meditating on, the things we're thinking on. Because all of these things channel our hearts and it's out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. We should take every aim to guard our heart for all the issues of life flow out of our hearts.

So, this thankfulness is very important for us as a nation, as a people, and as we drift farther and farther away from God, we glorify him less and less. We give less thanks to him and praise to him for all his goodness and kindness to us. We just simply move more and more towards internal corruption and self-destruction. This is why I think it's so important that you and I work to maintain a heart of gratitude and why I think it grieves the heart of God and grieves the heart of our savior when we when we lose a heart of gratitude to him for his kindness in his goodness to us. You know, the unique story in Christ's life that highlights this is found in Luke 17:

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him there. They were quarantined because of their leprosy. They stood at a distance [as they were social distancing back in their day] and called out in a loud voice:

“Jesus, master, have pity on us.” They were crying for mercy because of their situation. When he saw them, he said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” Now, when lepers went into remission, they could go and have a priest declare them clean, and then they could move about freely in society. It didn't happen very often, but when a leper, one who was socially isolated, found their sores disappear and their body healed for a time, then they could move about freely. It was a grace. It was a kindness to them, but they had to be sort of given a pass card by the priests. Now these individuals weren't healed yet, but Jesus said to them in faith, “Start moving. Go show yourselves to the priests.” And the scripture says, “As they moved and obeyed Christ, they were cleansed.” They were cleansed, they were healed of their leprosy. They were taken out of isolation. They no longer had to social distance. God had mercy on them. He was kind to them. He showed them grace. He showed them favor, as he does to all people. There is a general grace to everyone, and Romans 1 says to us that he has been good and shown his divine nature, his beauty and his love, to all people. And people try to suppress it. People try to hide it, people try to shove it down. But God wants to make himself known and has made himself known in a personal way and generally through revelation and scripture. And he wants us to acknowledge his presence and give thanks to him.

Now what happened with these ten individuals? The scripture says they were all cleansed. They were all touched, they were all ministered to by Christ. Only one of them, when he saw he was healed, came back. And he came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. It wasn't even one of Jesus people, one of the chosen Jews. It was a Samaritan. This passage right here highlights something that I think is important. When a person knows they've been touched by God and they're exuberant about being touched by God, they oftentimes will express this joy outwardly. In a loud voice, he praised him. He threw himself at Jesus feet and thanked him. Those that have been touched by God greatly, those that know they're forgiven much, often show great love back to God. But didn't God heal all ten and only one returned? If you do the basic math, it's only 10% of those that were given grace who came back and thanked him... 10 percent. Remember what Roman says: “The wrath of God is being revealed against all those who suppressed the truth, and they refused to glorify God for who he is and give thanks to him.” One came back and gave thanks. Jesus asked, “Were not all 10 cleansed. Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go. Your faith has made you well.”

There's always something to be thankful for, friends. If we'll look around in the world, we can write down two columns. We can always find things to put our minds on that are of good report, praiseworthy, excellent. And we should think on those things and cultivate a heart of praise and worship and thanks and gratitude before God, because as we humble ourselves before him, he gives us more grace. He opposes the proud who resist him, but he gives grace to the humble. And as we humble ourselves to him and surrender ourselves to him, we resist evil. We resist the wrong thinking in the world, that confused thinking, the foolish thinking, and the evil one will also flee. There's always something to be thankful for, and we should train our minds and our hearts to focus on those good things that God is doing in our lives. And it's clearly God's will that you and I live as thankful people. And then as we see in Luke 17, a heart of gratitude to God, for his goodness, to us, his kindness to us; it sets us up for more and more blessing in life.

What's the gratitude level in your heart today, friend? Can you see all of the good things that God has brought into your life: his provision, his kindness? You know, the scripture says if we have food and clothing and shelter, with this, we could be content. Maybe you're not the richest person in the world. Maybe you don't have every material thing you've ever wanted. But do you have the riches of Christ in your life, the forgiveness of sin, the hope of eternal life, the promise of peace, the supernatural peace that passes all understanding? If you haven't opened up your heart to Christ and gained these eternal riches, why not today? Why not now? God has been so good to us in giving us a world to live in. It's perfectly fitted for life, for flourishing. He's been so good to us and faithful to us; and the calendar, the seasons of the year and sustaining the Earth. He's so good to us in providing for us and helping us live in communities and freedom and joy to pursue him in this country that we have. He's been so kind to us in allowing us to freely choose and his wrath comes when we turn away from him, if we stop glorifying him, stop praising him, and stop giving thanks to him. It's absolutely essential that we pray for our nation, that God calls people back to himself, that we ask God to be working by his spirit, touching the hearts of people, helping them see and be aware of his presence, his kindness and goodness. So more and more people will turn and praise him and give him the honor and glory he deserved and give him thanks for who he is and for what he's done. So our thinking doesn't continue to grow futile and our hearts don't become more and more darkened.

The evidence is all around of a lack of gratitude, a lack of thanks, and a lack of acknowledgement of the goodness and kindness of God. Many in our nation are actually trying to kick God out, erase even the conscious awareness of the presence of God. But all of this takes us down a darkened path. Friends, we need to be bearers of the light. Those who acknowledge the goodness and kindness of God praise him for who he is. Give thanks to him. Meditate on his goodness. We preach not only the word of God, but we give testimony to the works of God all around us every day.

What is the gratitude level to God in your heart today? George Lillo says “When gratitude o’erflows the swelling heart, and breathes in free and uncorrupted praise for benefits received, propitious Heaven takes such acknowledgment as fragrant incense, and doubles all its blessings.” A heart of gratitude to God for his goodness in life sets us up for more and more and more blessing. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “The eyes of the Lord looked to and fro across the Earth, looking for those whose hearts are fully committed to him that he may strongly support them.”

Are you one who the wind of God's spirit is coming underneath to lift you because your heart is surrendered to him? It's worshipping him and praise it's giving thanks to him. Thanksgiving is not just a holiday, friend. It's a way of life that we want to live into. And when we head towards this Christmas season now and we turn our hearts towards the coming of a savior, you and I can be in constant praise to him for invading our Earth in the presence of his son Jesus, making his way known to us, inviting us to him, to come to him, to be forgiven before him and to become his children, children of the most high God forever and ever. He is worthy of our praise and glory and honor. Oh, how glorious the riches he's given us. I hope that as you go through this season, you're allowing God to show you his kindness, his goodness, his patience, his mercy to you, and cultivating you a heart of praise and gratitude and worship to him. It's the way to a clear mind, to rational thinking. It's the way out of darkness and into light. Let's continue to cultivate a heart of gratitude and praise before the Lord. It's absolutely essential.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time, and thank you for your word, which teaches us without error what to believe and how to live. May we be responsive to it as your word goes forth, may it find fertile soil in our hearts. May we be stirred by the work of your spirit and the planting of the seed of the word, to

become more and more shaped into your image and transformed into the glorious children of light, giving praise and honor and glory to you, giving you thanks from our heart continually. May it just overflow within us. May we become like rivers of living water just flowing through us, the power of your spirit. May all those listening, father, be touched by you. May their hearts be turned toward you and praise and worship and wanting to glorify and honor you. Help us not just as individuals, but as a nation, see your goodness, your kindness, your love. Call us back to yourself. Anchor us in you. Strengthen us in you. Convict us of sin and cause us to come by your kindness into repentance so we could walk more and more in the way of life, the ancient paths. Guide us in this by your spirit, father. We praise you. We thank you. We honor you. You have sent your son Jesus. You've done everything necessary for us to live a godly life. Help us respond in a way that's honoring to you. In Christ's name we pray.

Amen.