

A PERFECT RESPONSE TO GOD



Luke 17:11-19

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- A. Gifts for the needy
- B. Grace for the unworthy
- C. Thanks to the Lord

Jesus said,

“And it came about while He was on the way to Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a certain village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” And when He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And it came about that as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine--where are they? “Was no one found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” And He said to him, “Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:11-19)

What makes this story of the Ten Lepers in Luke 17:11-19 so moving? There is amazingly something even more dramatic than the healing of the sick, sore, rejected and despised lepers. What is that? Or perhaps I should ask, “What are those things?” Let me mention three amazing things.

1) The first is the simple fact that only one of those lepers actually returned and gave personal thanks to Jesus. There was only one person out of ten whose heart was so deeply moved that He came back and gave thanks.

2) Secondly, we are surprised at the response of the others. What about the other nine lepers who did not come back at all? They perhaps let religious laws or personal excitement just get in the way of their appreciation of what Jesus had done for them. We wonder if they were really thankful at all to the One who healed them.

3) Yes, there is another thing that astonishes us. Thirdly, we discover that it just so happened to be that the only grateful one was he who deserved the least as an outsider, as a Gentile. And the ungrateful were the ones who were religious, that is the closest to God.

As we come before this passage, my heart is humbled how ungrateful we can be to our great and mighty God. Why is it that the religious are more susceptible to hardness of the heart? The only real reason is that down deep they believe they deserve the good gifts of God while the Samaritan had no claim to them whatsoever. From Jesus' response, we can tell that the nine Jews greatly disappointed Jesus.

“And Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine--where are they? “Was no one found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” (Luke 17:17-18).

They esteemed the gift more than the Giver. They focused more on what they received than on the One who gave it to them. They could only maintain this immature perspective if they thought the Giver really was inconsequential. The most important thing to them was that they got what they wanted.

Whenever Christians live without deep gratefulness touching their hearts, they are like stale bread. They are like a door with a rusty hinge. Ungratefulness is a symptom of pride of life. Ungratefulness stems from assuming that we deserve the good things that we get. We can only wrongly think this way when we believe we deserve God's good treatment and have somehow forgotten how holy He is and how wayward we are. Has this contamination of ungratefulness touched your life? We can ask certain questions to test us:

- Do I get upset when I do not get what I ask for?
- Am I disappointed over what I do receive?
- Am I quickly bored over what He has given to me?
- Do I believe the Giver is more special than what He gives?

Last Sunday we were laughing at how downstairs I remarked I could hear my own preaching real clearly now with the new PA system. I tell you the truth. I hear this preaching about the need to be really thankful. I feel so stuffy and dead sometimes. I remember when I was small, receiving a Christmas gift. So often, I would only say a polite "thank you" but not be particularly grateful down deep. Even today, I still feel small in this respect. I haven't grown up. Do we have too much? Are we so enamored with ourselves, that we can't look at and appreciate the love of God?

The pilgrims when they first came here were not equipped to live in the cold Massachusetts's winter. Many of them died. Their food reserves were extremely low. Because of the help of a few Indians, they could plant some crops and then have a big meal the following fall. This is the experience that generates an expression of thankfulness. When I was in Russia, it was the end of harvest time. The winter was coming quickly. There was no grocery stores; only an outside poorly provided for market. Perhaps some of us would refuse to eat such lousy looking potatoes or stringy carrots. We would at least complain. We think in our hearts, "We deserve the best!" I saw these poor Russians pulling out their precious few bills buying only a few vegetables. Meat was a luxury. Even these vegetables were a luxury. We could complain about how ugly the buildings were or how they left everything broken. But there were no paint stores to buy paint to paint their homes, that is, if they had money. There were no hardware stores to fix broken sinks, showers and toilets. We could think, "How lowly. Don't they know how to fix things?!" But they don't have hardware stores; the new they could not afford! They sold only a few types of toys. For the first days at the hotel, there was no hot water and not much heat. Either everyone in this area had hot water or no one had it. The government hadn't yet turned it on. God was beginning to break my 'small' heart down.

Why do most Americans have these luxuries of abundant food, water, hot water, supplies, houses, cars, etc.? Because God has given them to us. I wonder how many times in our lives have we really first gone back and thanked God before we use and appreciate something? I am not sure how we can get a more thankful spirit among us, but I want us to. Do you? I don't want to be like one of those nine ungrateful healed lepers. Something is wrong when we can't see the goodness of the Giver.

God wants to give good gifts to His children, but He doesn't want us to treat the gifts as more important than He the Giver. He provides these things to us precisely so that we can be thankful to Him! We need to begin to force ourselves to go beyond the things and see the glory of what God is doing through these things. There is nothing like a genuine heart of appreciation to deepen a relationship. Those relationships that you count most valuable will be those ones in which you have a deep sense of appreciation for that other person. There is no greater proper response to the eternal almighty God than to give thanks. For in giving thanks, we at once declare our reliance on what God provides to meet our special needs and our exclusive dependence upon Him.

Humanism, the spirit of the world, balks at the idea of dependence upon an invisible God. Those in the world jumps right over Thanksgiving to a materialistic Christmas. I hear commercials using the word, "deserve." The commercials try to convince us to say to ourselves, "I deserve a break; I deserve this special gift." So we are encouraged to get that loan and show

how much we appreciate ourselves - take a cruise, buy that computer. No wonder our world is so empty and lonely.

Contrast this with the true Christian spirit which is mindful and attentive to the blessings that God has given him. He has been keeping track of God's goodness. At each meal he gives thanks. During each special celebration and season, he only moves ahead by recognizing the favor of God on his life. Contentment of the present is contrasted with greed for the future. We rest, not pursue. We are always acknowledging how dependent we are on God and at the same time grateful for His kindness. Jealousy and envy always assume they should have and deserve certain things but a thankful heart is content and happy with what God has given.

Biblical thanksgiving starts by seeing the overall provision of God through the immediate and various means He cares for our body and soul. It ends by giving thanks to the great 'Caregiver'. By faith we see beyond the person or circumstances that God has used to supply our needs and see how God has orchestrated everything to take care of our needs. Creation is a daily testimony of God's abundant care for us.

The most basic illustration is food. Of course we are glad to have good food! But are we knowledgeable of the fact that God has put you in a situation of abundance that many other people don't have? Do you recognize that God has through many different past and present circumstances brought this plate before you? Biblical thanks starts with acknowledging that God has supplied your needs. It goes on by responding in praises and thanks. What does your 'grace' at meal times sound like? Do you recognize your dependence upon God, His gracious supply for your needs and the happy heart you have because He has been so good to you? This is biblical thanks. Biblical thanks always demands that we use our eyes of faith to see beyond the good things to the supplier of good things.

Some of you might wonder if it is good enough to give thanks or do you need the heart of thanks? Maybe you ask, "If I am not thankful for my food, should I be a hypocrite and give thanks?" Biblical thanks has to go beyond the mere act of giving thanks to the humble acknowledgement and joyful receiving of God's good and gracious supply. So what should you do if you find an unthankful or somewhat neutral or agnostic heart, I do not suggest stop giving thanks. Just stop eating! After a couple of meals when your legs are dragging and you hear your heart beating, then you become aware what a privilege we have to eat from the Lord's hands.

Remember the warning in the OT? God warned them that when they received in abundance, they should be extra careful for this is when the act of giving thanks takes the place of being thankful. Why? Deuteronomy 31:20 says, "For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant."

I would not like to conclude by using three brief word studies from the book of Ephesians. I want to remind us how dependent we are on Him for these things and how our warm hearts of thankfulness lead us into a deeper and warmer relationship with our heavenly Father.

A. Gifts for the needy (donor)

God has blessed us by giving us many wonderful things, both as individuals, families, society and church. Gifts speak of special ways we have received things to unexpectedly bless us. Gifts cannot be demanded. Nor should gifts be looked upon as things always having strings attached. A gift should be looked upon as a simple or sometimes deep expression of love that a person brings into the life of another.

Does God so 'gift' His people? We see very clearly the way God has gifted His people. The word 'gift' is used in only four verses in Ephesians, but the concept is rooted right from the beginning of this very book when he speaks of the Blessed God blessing His people with blessings.

Salvation is a gift. Eph 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God." We cannot earn it. We do not deserve it.

Service is a gift. Eph 3:7 says, “of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.” Ministry gifts are a gift. Eph 4:7 says,

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”

Gifts are designed to make our relationship with God more intimate. We are to draw close to God.

B. Grace for the unworthy (χάρις)

Grace depicts of how we live in His undeserved favor. Grace is used many more times than gift. While gift describes what is given freely, the word ‘grace’ emphasizes our unworthiness to receive His show of kindness. Grace means He treats us better than we deserve.

1) Grace is used first of all to describe God’s overwhelming good disposition to treat His people well. Eph 1:6 encourages us to “praise the glory of His grace.” In Eph 1:7 we are “redeemed, forgiven of our trespasses by the riches of His grace.” Grace is an attribute of God which depicts His willingness and ability to treat people better than they deserve. Do we see this in theory only? No.

2) We also see grace described as something that brings theory to reality. God’s grace comes to us. His people. In the beginning of the book in 1:2 Paul says, “Grace to you...” and at the end in 6:24 he says, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible.” In the middle he says in 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.”

3) Lastly, we find that the grace that begins with God, enters our lives from Him and then goes out from our lives to other people. We have become givers of grace. Eph 4:29 says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such [a word] as is good for edification according to the need [of the moment,] that it may give grace to those who hear.” You want grace to come from your lives.

I can only say that we are unworthy to receive God’s goodness. We do not receive anything good because we deserve it. Death came upon Adam and Eve once they sinned, but it was postponed so that God could bring grace into the lives of many of their descendants.

C. Thanks to the Lord (eucaristeo)¹

The third word we will look at is the word ‘thanks.’ Thanks is used three times in this book.

First of all thanks is given to God for faithful brothers and sisters. Eph 1:16 says, “do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention [of you] in my prayers; each fellow Christian is a sign of God’s amazing grace to us. Each Christian, is a marvelous sight of God’s love. And so Paul, though not seeing there has been much received personally for them, thanks God that they are a blessing to so many. He has heard of their love for all the saints. This kind of thanks goes to God. He sees the real origin of their wonderful and encouraging work of love. We can see it as Paul seeing these new Christians as a gift resulting partially from his own ministry.

Second of all, because of God’s work in our lives, we can not longer speak like the world. They speak empty words because they have empty lives. Eph 5:4 says, “[there must be no] filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

We also find in Ephesians 5:20 that the direction of our thanks must go to our Lord and that the frequency of that thanks must be non-stop. Eph 5:20 says, “Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”

¹ eucaristeo eucharisteo give thanks 26, thank 12, be thankful 1; 39. 1) to be grateful, feel thankful; 2) give thanks.

Summary

There are many gifts around us. Like the lepers we have received of our Lord's kindness. We have not deserved these gifts. They were given by grace. To think that we have them means we deserved them is totally a mistaken notion. God wants to take us beyond the gifts to the throne of God. He wants our hearts to so consistently exude thanks that we will treat the gifts though special as secondary. For the gifts were given to deepen our relationship with our Heavenly Father. The gifts are given as pointers along the road to teach us about God's love.

Ten lepers were healed. Only one came back. Only one leper remembered his healing. The religious ones didn't come back. Jesus asked, "Where are the others? Were there not ten?" I hope that even though some of us have been a bit slow coming back, that now we might join with the one who did saying, "Lord, I'm slow. But I am here to give thanks for the most wonderful things in life. Thank you."

Communion meditation

In I Corinthians 11:24 Jesus took the bread and gave thanks. Do you know that this word 'thanks' is comes from the Greek word grace. It literally means 'good grace.' Some churches actually use this Greek word and transliterate into English for the word communion - eucharist. This is the word for thanks and is used because Jesus gave thanks. This is why we pray giving thanks during communion.

But before we pray, what is it that Jesus gave thanks for? He gave thanks for the hardest thing possible. For the very breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine represented the giving of his life within the next 24 hours. Giving thanks is not done just when it is easy but because by faith we know our loving God would not ask anything from us that was not best.