

Where are the Nine?

Luke 17:11-19

Thanksgiving is one of America's favorite holidays. Unfortunately, in our modern culture it has come to be more identified with parades, football and turkey dinner. It seems fewer and fewer Americans set aside the day to give thanks to God for His blessings upon us.

Thanksgiving Day meant something far different to our forefathers. Our history reveals that our nation was settled by those who were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't believe the revisionists who are rewriting our American History books. **Ours is a Christian heritage.** The first permanent settlement in America was at Plymouth. It was settled by the Pilgrims who were a group of Christian separatists that broke with the Church of England. **On September 16, 1620 they sailed from Plymouth, England to America on the Mayflower.** Before they landed they penned and signed what has come to be known as the *Mayflower Compact*. While still on board the ship they set forth the fact that they wanted to establish a colony that was based on biblical principles. **Their signatures acknowledged God's sovereignty in their lives and their need to obey Him.** They signed a document that declared they were establishing a new colony in the New World "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith." Out of the 103 who landed, 51 died the first winter. **After the harvest of that first year, Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer.** The custom prevailed until Abraham Lincoln made it an official American holiday during the days of the Civil War.

Much of the secularization of America has done away with the original meaning of Thanksgiving. No longer do most Americans see their existence on this soil "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith." **In spite of our problems, if anyone on earth should be giving thanks to God it is those of us who are living in the United States of America.**

Someone has noted that if you reduce the world population to 1,000 and put them all in one city it would have quite a distinctive look. Only 46 of that 1,000 would be Americans. Nine hundred and fifty-four would represent the rest of the world. **Yet, these 46 would receive half of the income from the entire city.** These 46 people's life expectancies would be 75 years of age while the rest would be 40 years of age. These 46 people would eat 70% above the daily food requirement while 80% of the rest of the city would never get a balanced meal. In fact, the kitchen disposals of the 46 people would eat better than 80% of the city.

We are a blessed people. However, I am afraid that we are *not* a thankful people. Even within the American church, such things as *pluralism*, *humanism*,

and *secularism* have seen to that. And yet, the giving of thanks is a powerful phenomenon with a liberating effect.

There is an encounter near the end of Christ's earthly life, which gives a formula for putting thanksgiving into our lives in such a way that it brings wholeness and purpose. We find our Lord en route to Jerusalem. As He passed through the regions of Samaria and Galilee, He enters a certain village, and encountered 10 men who are lepers who lifted up their voices calling out for mercy. **Jesus spoke healing to them and sent them to show themselves to the priests.** Only one of them returned to give thanks to God. Jesus asked a penetrating question, "Where are the nine?" **The response to these ten lepers is revealing.** The Lord Jesus is showing us there are three actions we should take to live life to its fullest. **We should get up.** This has to do with *fortitude*. If we don't, we might miss the *Master*. **We should get out.** This has to do with *attitude*. If we don't, we might miss the *miracle*. **Finally, we should get back.** This has to do with *gratitude*. If we don't, we might miss the *moment*.

Luke 17:11-13 says, "Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."

Do you get the picture? Jesus passes through a certain village and is met by 10 *lepers*. They had heard the reports, strange rumors, how He had touched lepers and made them pure. **They "stood afar off" because they could not get close.** Mosaic Law isolated lepers from social contact. They were forbidden to come within six feet of a whole person. **If the wind was blowing they could not come within 50 yards.** If someone inadvertently approached them they were commanded to shout, "Unclean, unclean."

So what did these lepers do when Jesus was passing by? They *got up*. This showed a great amount of *fortitude*. They began to shout, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." **They could have sat there in their hopelessness but they didn't.** Look at them. They are all alike. **They are all lepers.** They all suffer from the same hideous disease. It slowly eats away at the body erasing facial features first. **Then the fingers; the hands are frozen into claws before they simply fall off.** The feet are filled with sores and become bandaged stumps before they are left behind. The odor was nauseating. **The appearance was ghastly.** The leper had no competitor. He suffered the fate of a long, slow, agonizing death lived out in some leper colony isolated from friends and family. **The leper was an outcast. He was shut off.** A leper in the first century was always simply an abandoned bit of human wreckage living in hopelessness.

All of these 10 men had a desperate determination to live. Though the future seemed futile, these particular men refused to give up. When they hear that Jesus is passing by they all go out to see Him. They all appeal to Him for help. It is interesting that they did not appeal for justice. They appealed for mercy. They did not ask Christ to bless them on the basis of what they deserved. They cried out for mercy.

Some of us live in constant defeat because we are holding out for justice. Perhaps someone has *wronged* us and we *harbor resentment* for years. We want justice. Some of us have been abused. We want justice. However, justice belongs to God. Give it over to Him. Truth will always win in the end. Our plea should be one for *mercy*.

The Lord Jesus was passing by and here were ten men who got up with fortitude and did not miss the Master. Is there anyone sitting beside this road this morning? Time and again Jesus has passed by but you never called out to Him. Or, maybe you sought comfort in people around you, and yet, you are still in your misery. On this Thanksgiving Sunday it is time to *get up*. This has to do with fortitude. If we don't we might miss the Master.

Look at verse 14, "So when he saw them, He said to them, Go, show yourselves to the priests. And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed."

Do you have a mental picture? Not only did these men *get up*; but they *got out*. They obeyed the Lord, which is evidence of the fact that they exercised some measure of *faith*. What an attitude we see here. They were not healed at this particular point. They were still lepers. A leper was to show himself to the priest after he had been healed. It took *faith* for these men to act in obedience to God's word and go show themselves to the priests while they were still lepers. And yet, the Bible says, "So it was as they went, they were cleansed!"

Jesus said, "Go show yourself to the priest." This immediately presented a bit of a problem for these 10 men. Only cleansed lepers were to do this according to Leviticus Chapters 13 and 14. To hear this command is one thing but to get up and get out with nothing but faith in Christ's word is another thing. The indication in this command was if they went, they would be healed. At this point they are still lepers. Therefore, it all boils down to one simple fact: the only way to test the value of Christ's words is to obey them!

And so they take Jesus at his word and get out. What an attitude of faith. They start to walk. Many of us know little of this journey to the priests. They *got up* and *got out* by *faith* at the word of Christ even though *they had no visible evidence* that it was true. Many of us live here in these verses. We have the word from God yet we have no visible evidence that it is true. But we are walking. We are not going to stop at simply getting up; we are going to get out.

Tragically, too many lepers never start walking until they can see the evidence of their healing. And the result is they spend their days with hope lost and gone.

The Bible simply says, "As they went, they were cleansed." **The language of the New Testament, the passive voice here, leaves no doubt that it was God who performed the miracle!** All of them, as they went on their way, were cleansed! Think about it. **All they had was the word of Christ.** All they had was the *promise of God.* They walked in *faith and obedience.*

Before every great miraculous work of God, He moves us out where all we have is His promise. "As they went" was an act of faith. Those words have never been spoken about some of us. **Oh, we might get up and call for mercy, but too few of us get out and walk in obedience to God's word.** We are simply *hearers of the Word and not doers of the Word.* Had they not done this they would have missed the miracle. Look at the 10 lepers. **Now they are clean.** All they had to hold to was the word of Christ. They obeyed and He was true to that word. **They got up and then they got out in faith.** Faith is the victory!

Look at verse 17:15-19, "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner? And He said to him, Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Look at these 10 men. They were *all lepers.* They *all called on the Lord Jesus.* **They all stepped out in faith.** They all were *healed.* They *all got up.* **They all got out.** But here the likeness ends.

Stand with them there on that road for a moment. They look at themselves and all of a sudden they realize they are clean. They are amazed. **They begin to hug one another.** Then one of them says, "I haven't held my wife in months." A moment later we look and he is running down the road toward his home. Another says, "I have never seen my newborn son." And he too is gone. Another quickly exclaims, "I haven't been to my shop in almost a year." And he is off and running. **One by one they are all gone until there is only one left standing in the road alone.** The other nine are never heard from again. Oh, they *got up* and they *got out*, but they never *got back.*

Look at the one solitary man as he stands in the road. He too is looking down the road toward his *home.* He too has a *family.* **He too has a business.** He too has *friends.* But something is more pressing. **He has to go back to where Jesus is.** This has to do with *gratitude.* If he doesn't, he may miss the *moment.* **Is**

there anyone here on that road today? Once you were in a crisis. **Once you got up and called for mercy.** Once you too *got out and walked in faith*, but when the blessing came you forgot to *get back* with gratitude and in so doing *you missed a moment*, a very important moment.

Notice the Bible says in verse 15, "And one of them." **I am sorry to say we do not even know his name.** He is simply referred to as "one of them." His name is never even mentioned. **He belongs to that vast company of people who live their beautiful lives and do their worthwhile deeds without ever telling us who they are.** We don't know his name but he is shouting to us today to **"get back."** It has to do with *gratitude*. If we don't we might miss the moment.

Look at him. Verse 15 says He returned and "with a loud voice glorified God." **Why was he so excited? Why was he so loud? If this man lived today there would be those that would put their hands on his shoulder and try to calm him down.** Some people are not comfortable with *loud doxologies and glory hallelujahs*. Well, that is their loss, not His. For way too many of us it has been far too long since we have felt the touch of the Master's hand.

Why is it that so many of us are like the 10 who call on the Lord Jesus when we are in times of need and so few of us know so little about praise and thanksgiving? Luke 17:16 says this man went back and "fell down on his face at His feet giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan." **Do you see any difference here?** In verse 12 they "stood afar off." **But now we find this man at Jesus' feet.** That is what *cleansing* will do for you. The Bible says, "And he was a Samaritan." The "he" is emphatic. **That is, HE was a Samaritan!** Here was a man distant to the covenant promises. He was like the woman in Samaria and the man on the Jericho road. **In other words, they were the "outcast" of society!** Thank God, for a Savior who still opens His arms to those of us who are the "outcast" of society!!

Jesus then asks three rhetorical questions designed to cause us to be reflective upon this encounter, "Were not 10 cleansed?" Yes! "Where are the nine?" **He was not asking for an answer. He was making an observation.** They had missed the moment. Then he asks, "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" **I am afraid too many of us in this service today find ourselves in the company of the nine.** Once we got up and got out but then we went on our own way when the blessings came.

Why didn't they return? Did they feel they deserved this miracle? Human nature has a way of always claiming our own rights.

As I sat at my desk and put the material together for this sermon I thought about my own life. With all of the heart-broken kids without *mothers*

to nurture them, I asked myself did I deserve to have a *mother who sacrificed so much for me?* With all of the kids with *dads* who have no time for them, did I deserve to have had a *dad who always loved and encouraged me?* *With all of the parents whose kids have broken their hearts do Linda and I deserve the kind of children who have brought us so much joy and honor?* With so many *wives* that have been unfaithful to their husbands, *do I deserve the good and godly one that Christ has given me?* With so many *pastor friends* whose church has caused them so much heartache and pain, *do I deserve to be the pastor of the greatest church on the face of the earth?* *When I see men and women who live their lives in sin and shame with guilt and defeat written across their faces, do I deserve to have been forgiven by the grace of God?* The answer is a simple one. I deserved none of this. *It is all unmerited favor and grace, marvelous grace.*

I hope Thanksgiving is more to all of us than simply parties and football games and parades. The Lord Jesus is still asking, "Where are the nine?" Are any of the *nine* in this building today?

We have these words of Jesus in verse 19, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well." *The important fact here is that the Lord of this universe wants to be thanked.* Hebrews 13:15-16 says, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Grace works in surprising places. Only the Samaritan heard the Lord Jesus say, "Your faith has made you well." While the other nine hurried to see the priest, this "*outcast*" from society went back to the very source of life and healing. *Whatever else you might have tried, Jesus is still the answer!*

If you have never been saved, why not come today?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

You have blessed my life beyond measure. Your grace has been sufficient for my every need. Give me the courage to live a thankful and praise filled life as I seek to honor You with my attitude of gratitude. In Jesus' name. Amen.