

1 in 10 Thanksgiving

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now I want this morning to look back at the passage you read in Luke chapter 17, particularly the last section from verse 11 to verse 19. A couple of weeks ago on Sunday morning, no sorry Sunday evening we looked at King Jesus unwrapped. So we looked really at, I hope appropriately at that time of year at Jesus Christ as the great gift who comes to his people.

And one of my pet hates in life is when people don't give thanks for things they receive. My children are probably fed up of me nagging them for days and days after Christmas to write their thank you letters. But these things are good to do better than a text. Better than on Facebook. Better even than just phoning. It's nice to get a letter that says thank you. Still the old ways are the best ways. Old Father Christmas here, speak in. Okay, thankfulness. G.K. Treserton says, I would maintain that thanks is one of the highest forms of thought and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder. And it's a great thing you know to be thankful, to be grateful. And not just to be grateful but to express gratitude, to say thanks and to be thankful. And that I believe is the whole point of what is recorded for us here in the story of the 10 that are healed of leprosy and the spiritual lessons for ourselves as we come into a new year. It's always a good time to reflect. It's a good time to think back, to think back on the last year and also to anticipate the year that lies ahead. Knowing that our times are in God's hands. Knowing that what may be mysterious to us and the future that is unknown to us isn't unknown to him. But to come with us an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving in our Christian lives. So we've got a story here of these lepers who are healed of their leprosy. 10 of them together. There's Samaritans and there's Jews. There's maybe one Samaritan, the rest are Jews we don't know. But there's a mixture of people together and it's amazing how being ostracised as they would have been as lepers, that's why they were out in the country, they weren't part of society, they weren't allowed to touch people, they weren't allowed to converse with people in terms of social intercourse, they weren't part of the social circuit. How being on the outside brought people together. It's funny that isn't it, just as on the side. Because the Jews in Samaritans didn't speak. But here they are and they're together because they're all in the same boat. They're all struggling. They're all on the outside. They're all lepers, they're all unwell, really seriously unwell. And they hear Jesus is coming and so they cry out when

Jesus passes, as do others in the accounts of the gospels, for mercy. They cry out for mercy. They probably know that he's the Messiah that has been chosen. They've heard of miracles that he's done. They're excited that they've heard that people have been healed and so they cry out for mercy. Jesus, Master, have pity on us. They're crying out. This is the last chance to loon for them. And they're crying out for healing, for mercy, for Jesus Christ to act on their behalf. Jesus doesn't go towards them, He doesn't touch them as He does sometimes in other healings. He simply asks them to go to the priest. That's all he says. Just go to the priest. Why does he tell them that? Because the priest was always the one who would need to declare a leper healed. So he said, just go to the priest.

And as they were going to the priests, they were cleansed. They were made whole. One of them, and we're not told that, it's kind of a very sketchy story, we're not giving much details. One of them comes back. Probably he comes back before he's even reached the priest. He's kind of walking along. He's got his hands, he's got his arms. He feels his face. He's been healed. And he says, that's unbelievable. I've been healed and he just goes straight back to Jesus who healed him, to worship him and to give thanks to God, praising to God in a loud voice. I throw himself at Jesus' feet. Notice Jesus doesn't reject worship where the disciples and others would. Jesus accepts worship, rightly, because he's God. But he accepts this man's worship and this guy is a Samaritan. He's a double outsider.

[4 : 59] He's a double whammy outsider. He's a Samaritan and he's also a leper. And yet he comes back to give thanks to God and Jesus asks, where are the rest of them? There's everyone else.

And this story is all in the context of the passage and it's a passage about faith, it's a passage about grace and it's a passage about understanding God's mercy in our lives. So it's more than just a healing story. It's more than just a kind of nice story with a moral. It's getting to the very roots of our understanding of what God's done in our lives and our response to God for what he's done in our lives. That's Christians. And as Christians at the beginning of a new year, it's good to just think about that, isn't it? It's good just to spend a few moments thinking about that. The central message of this story is to have an attitude of gratitude, is to be grateful in our lives, to return our thanks to God for what he's done. There's lots of different questions you could ask about this passage.

There's kind of a subtext going on there. You read the commentators and they've got angles and things going on. But the simple clear message is a message that Jesus wants to get across is, what is our attitude to him? Do we return thanks to

God? Do we show our gratitude for what he's done for us in our lives by worship and praise and obedience to him? Thanksgiving, that's the theme really for this morning. See, Christ can't hide his disappointment. He doesn't kind of say, oh, it's great, you know, healed us. It's tremendous. It's another miracle that's worked. He doesn't just move on. When the one guy comes back, you can feel the disappointment in Christ. He says, where's everyone else?

Where's the other nine? You can sense that, can't you? You can sense that disappointment and sadness in his voice as he speaks and as he looks for the other. And he's not ultimately looking for them to come back to say thank you to him. He says, where's the other nine or none found to return to give praise to God? It's God that he wants to have the glory and God hasn't been thanked. Christ can't hide his disappointment. Now there's a massive change in these guys' life. They were on the outside. We have no concept of what it was like to be a leper. You wouldn't get to your home. You wouldn't get to the New Year's Day party. You wouldn't get to the celebrations today. You wouldn't get into the city limits.

You'd be outside, you'd be in five somewhere. That's bad enough for most people. And they stopped saying things about five. I like five. It's good. But you would be outside. It really was horrendous. And it was a debilitating, horrible, miserable disease. Limbs began to fall off because you didn't feel anything. You could put your hand in fire and it wouldn't hurt. But your limbs would be irreparably damaged and your whole skin would begin to peel off. I'm not going to go into detail, but it was a horrendous life and a massive change in an instant had overcome these guys. They were healed physically, spiritually. Well, that's open to question. We may come back to that just before we finish. But when it came to the choice, when it came to the decision as they were running down the road, one of them stops, come on, let's go back. Let's go back and give thanks to Jesus for what He's done. Nine of them say, no, we want to go to the priest. We want to get back in among society. We want to be accepted again. That's more important to us. We can maybe think of thanking Jesus again. It seems that God was sidelined there. Maybe I'm reading too much into the story, but that certainly is what Jesus thinks. Where are the other nine? Where are they? It's as if His healing, this amazing miracle of healing which may have included spiritual healing for them also, is taken for granted. Now, if we go immediately and apply that today for ourselves, let's take it out of Galilee 2000 years ago, because it's easy to not consider that for ourselves. Let's take our own lives today as Christians. Isn't it easy for us? Not just to think back to our conversion for which we can never give enough gratitude and thanks that we have been redeemed and saved by God's amazing grace, as we've been looking at for the last six months. But isn't it easy for us on a day-to-day basis when things go wrong, when we're struggling, that we cry out for mercy, have pity on me, for help me today in this situation. And then when we receive help, when we get from God what we've asked, we just carry on regardless. We take His mercy and His gratitude and His grace and His goodness for granted. We forget to return thanks. You know when I was growing up in our home? Probably when I was younger, it probably ceased as it's called. But Dad used to say, before we rose from the table, let's return thanks. That was something that happened in the old days. You said grace at the beginning of the meal, you return thanks at the end. Now it could become ritualistic of course. But there's something nice in that, isn't there? That we return thanks to God as a way of living. You know what the

[10:53] Bible's full of? What's probably one of the most common words in the Bible? Well, it may be not, but it's certainly in the Bible a lot. Remember. Remember. There's a sacrament based around it. Remember. Don't forget. Remember, remember, remember, remember my grace. Remember that I took you out of Egypt. Remember that you came to the Promised Land. Remember my forgiveness. Remember my healing. Remember these things. Remember. And we're so prone to forget. May it be that today we can take a moment in all the midst of family and in the midst of celebration and happiness to give thanks. To give thanks for Jesus Christ. To give thanks for grace. To give thanks for faith and the gift of faith. And if you're not a Christian, to consider why you're being so ungracious, lacking in gratitude, in rejecting the offer of salvation, treating it with disrespect. See, gratitude comes from an understanding.

Doesn't it? Even the word gratitude comes from an understanding of the word grace. It's an understanding of grace. In this story, one out of ten understood, maybe that's similar generally in the world, or even in the Christian church. Maybe it's only one in ten that understands these things. Only one in ten understood to come back to give thanks. Even in life generally we can give thanks for common grace. The fact that you could walk here today, or others could take you today. You get clothes and you get food, you get warmth and you've got all these ordinary things. You got up to do your heart was beating. You're living, you're alive.

Many things to give thanks for today from God. But in the context of this passage, it's about gratitude is about understanding grace. What Christ has done for us, because the passage is all about faith and about understanding faith, you see. Because as Luke speaks about faith, we then come on to this story of gratitude. And he talks about avoiding sin. He said, you'd be better, a millstone would be put round your neck, thrown into the sea, rather than causing a little one to sin. One of the little children here, or any other little one around us. Because grace understands, gratitude understands the seriousness of sin and how destructive it is. And so we say, oh, well we want to let our kids be happy and do whatever they want, because that's what makes them happy. But that's not gratitude. It's not understanding grace. It's not understanding sin, and it's not understanding ourselves and them. So we want to be protective and jealous of them, and jealous of sin that they sometimes want to embrace in their lives, and we want to protect them from it. But gratitude also understands forgiveness. That's crazy situation. Would you ever forgive someone who came to you seven times in the same day, and made the same mistake seven times, and asked for forgiveness 70?

By the fifth time, would you not say you're not genuine? It's not doing you any good to be forgiven. I'm not going to forgive you. Jesus doesn't say that. He says, if people come to you however many times asking for forgiveness, or they recognize it's wrong, you say you do the unexpected, you forgive them. Because that's grace. That's what God is doing for you every day. Have you been in that busy Wednesday night with a small meeting in the home, and we talked about different things, and someone talked about how often, how faithful God is, because we so often go and go and go and go, asking for forgiveness for the same things again and again. Now we do it. Oh yeah, of course we do it. We don't expect other people to do it. But that's life, isn't it? And that's grace, and we are to forgive, and be grateful for grace, and forgive unlimited amount of times. It's impossible. Of course it is. It's like asking a mountain to be lifted up and thrown into the sea. Absolutely impossible. That's why we need God like we spoke about to the children. We need God to help us. And it's a grace and a gratitude that humbles us. It's a difficult little bit, verses 7 to 10 of this passage, which talks about the servant. Now it looks like the Master has been pretty ungrateful here, doesn't it? He's saying, look, I'm not going to, you know, you're going to make my supper before you have your own, and I'm not going to thank you. I don't think that's the point of the story. The point of the story isn't that the Master doesn't say thanks to the servant, because the servant was just doing what he's supposed to do. It's about priorities and perspectives in our living. And we're to serve God willingly and serve others willingly, rather than expecting God to serve us. That's really what he's saying. He's talking about role reversal in that story. And he said, very often we live our lives thinking that God is our servant, that He's to be our bidding, that we snap our fingers and say, come on, God, give me what I want, because He's our servant. And that's what we want when things go wrong. We want them to put them right. When we're struggling, we want them to make us feel great. And it's all about Him serving us. And yet what grace understands and what gratitude shows is a humble servant spirit that we serve God, not God serves us. And it's a mindset, it's a way of thinking, so that we are servants of God, not that God is a servant of us. I think that's where

so much of our thinking, our faith struggles, isn't it? When things go wrong, it's because we expect God to just lay out a red carpet in front of us. And we're expecting heaven now. I'm not going to say more about that. I'm going to preach about that in a couple of weeks. We expect heaven now, but heaven isn't now, it's not yet. And God is the one who we are to serve. And yet the amazing reality is, unlike this master and this servant,

[16:53] God actually does serve us. And He does reward us. Isn't that amazing? So He's not really like this master at all. But He wants our attitude to be one of service rather than demanding of God. God is a great God. So gratitude affects, or, yeah, it reflects our understanding of grace. And then very briefly, I think praise and thanks. An expression of gratitude, praise and thanks, is good for the soul. It's good for you. You know, we all, magazines this time of year, it's all about healthy living and what to do and what diet to be on and all these kind of things. Healthy living, it's good for you. Well, praise and thanks is really good for you. It's good for your soul. It's good for your body. Now, were the other nine healed? Or were they made whole? I can't answer that question. I don't know. They were definitely cleansed because we're told that they went out in verse 14 and they were cleansed. But in verse 19, and I don't know whether it's an interesting change of language, but we're told that Jesus says, the one who came back, rise and go, your faith has made you well.

She's different. The other nine were cleansed, maybe just from their leprosy. I don't know. Maybe it's reading too much into it. But certainly, the Samaritan who came back, he was made well. There's something really wholesome about what Christ has done and what he has enjoyed because he has come back in thanksgiving to God. I'm not sure whether that's a deliberate change of language there, just to point out the difference. It may be that they were all healed because usually in the Bible, healing went along with faith. So I'm not making any definitive statement there about the other nine. Maybe they just were like most of us who came to faith, were given faith but failed to show gratitude and therefore live poverty stricken spiritual lives.

We're saved. We're saved as those cluts from the burning, as it were, just to know more about the skin of our teeth, as it were. Heart felt gratitude. When he returned, he received great blessing. He received the blessing of Jesus on him. He said, rise and go, your faith has made you well. He certainly had faith and he's made well through his faith in Jesus Christ and that's an amazing blessing he received. And isn't it interesting that this heart felt gratitude, this heart felt gratitude comes from the outsider, the double outsider. Remember that, isn't that interesting? The Samaritan, the double outsider, he's the one who comes back and there's something interesting in that. I think that's often reflected in the church when people come to faith from the outside. Maybe from really rotten, from a human point of view, rotten lives, broken in lots of different ways, socially and physically broken lives. When they come from that place and they come to faith, they are often far more grateful than those of us like me being brought up in the church, take it for granted, heard it since the womb, know it all. Is that the danger of our situation today? I know it, I've been there, I've heard it all and we take God's grace for granted. It's a great privilege to be grown up, to grow up in the church but a huge responsibility also to move from a terrible place of ingratitude to a place of thankful and humble praise and wonder.

It may be that you and I need to get back to that place of thanksgiving and joy and wonder in our Christian lives and stop taking grace for granted. It may be the message you need to hear today from the Holy Spirit is get back to God in 2012. Stop living on the edge, stop living on the edge of unbelief and of sin and rebellion. Stop taking this grace for granted, stop thinking, yeah, I'll go back to him when things are better, when I'm older, when I'm nearer the grave. Start living for him today with a thankful heart because that reflects an understanding of your own heart, my own heart and an understanding of his grace and what he's done for us. Heart felt gratitude comes from the outsider very often but the reality is, isn't it that we are ultimately all outsiders? We saw that in the story of Jesus, didn't we? Jesus, our representative was the outsider who's banished to Egypt, the outsider who's representing us. We're all outsiders for God and we all need to come in and grace brings us in so we should have great gratitude and when we don't have gratitude it's because we're not in the Word. It's because we're living in the world and we're looking at the standards around us and we've lost sight and we've closed our Bibles and we've closed the truth and the Holy Spirit's crying out to speak to us and we're not listening because the Bible's closed. Heart felt gratitude often comes from the outsider. Gratitude often counteracts our tendency to selfishness and complacency.

[22 : 35] The other nine seemed to be focusing on themselves, didn't they? Their healing, their lives, their position in society. As we are thankful, it immediately changes the perspective, it changes the way we're thinking and the way we're looking and the way we're living. It makes us look out. That's right, even at a human level, it's brilliant to give thanks because it makes you great for someone spent the time, went out to the shop, bought that present, wrapped it, took it around to the house, gave it to me. They remember my birthday, they remember my Christmas. You know these things, it takes us out of ourselves and our tendency to self-absorption.

Thanksgiving as we count our blessings may it be what we do in our Christian lives as we think out and look out to what Jesus has done. And also that gratitude brings blessing.

It brings blessing. It's a blessed place to be as a Christian. There can be no worse place for the Christian. The genuine backslidden Christian is the ungrateful Christian. We may look great, we may be preachers, we may wear all the right clothes, we may have all the orthodox statements, we may just walk the right way according to everyone else.

But if our hearts are ungrateful, we're in the worst place because it means we're proud, it means we haven't dealt humbly before God and we're missing out on the blessing. We don't get the blessing by trying to live outwardly like Christians lived outwardly in our parents' generation or before that or living like anyone else outwardly today. We receive the blessing when we're grateful from our hearts out for what God has done. The nine other guys missed out on this blessing. They missed out on God's Jesus' smile. They missed out on His thankfulness that He was there. They missed out on the relationship and the fellowship that He had with the Samaritan. They missed out on what He said, rise and go, your faith has made you well. The assurance of faith, the assurance of God's presence in company. Rise and go, your faith has made you well. That's a great statement. It's made you whole. It's made you well rounded. It's made you complete. It's made you mature.

It's a great perspective to have in our Christian lives as we are grateful to God. It gives us the right perspective for going into 2012. Having an attitude of gratitude is the way to be. It's very simple. There's nothing magical about that. But it's about wrestling with God. It's about being face to face with Jesus Christ. It's about thinking through what He's done for us. And as we do and as we return our thanks and praise and song and obedient living and service and sacrificial love and all these things, we hear His voice.

[25 : 45] We hear His blessing. We hear His favour in our hearts and in our lives. And we feel His closeness. Do you feel, be honest today with yourself. Do you feel the closeness of Christ in your life? Do you feel His nearness? Do you feel His blessing? Maybe it's time to sit down and reassess the last time we gave thanks. The last time we were grateful. And it shouldn't really be once a month or something. But this is my day for gratitude. It's a daily, it's an ongoing, it's an attitude of life, an attitude of living. So let's today on New Year's Day, let's give thanks. I don't know how many more years I've got here. I don't know how many more years you've got here. This may be our last time together like this.

This life that you've got is unique. You're not going to get to live it again. You know, it's not, we don't believe in reincarnation. You don't get to come back as a frog again.

Not again, but as anything else. This is one life, it's linear, starts and it ends. And the life to be is different. It's not going to be like this. You will never get the opportunity again to tell your friends about Jesus, your unique friends, your neighbors. You'll never have the opportunity to live for Christ in a battlefield again. This is the only battlefield there is. Heaven's not going to be a battlefield. Now is the time. You've got privileges today that angels never have and never have had. How are we using them? You have family, you have faith, you have friends. Give thanks for 2011 and use that as a stepping stone for living in 2012 for Him. Never leaving Him nor forsaking Him. Choose this day whom you will serve as for me and my house. We will serve the Lord. May that be what we can do.

Christ is our Saviour. Christ is our Lord. He's not a bit player. We haven't put Him back in the drawer because Christmas is over. He comes out. He's in our hearts. He's in our lives. Resolve today to follow Him and serve Him. Second best isn't good enough for Jesus. Bit player isn't good enough for Jesus because He's standing in heaven if I can use that illustration. Looking from heaven and saying, where are the other nine? And saying, take a look because He's looking back. Where are all those that I've redeemed? Where are they to bring praise? How are they bringing praise by life? By obedience, by service, by sacrifice? Where are they? He's looking for our lives. He's looking for our praise.

He loves that and He loves to bless us. May that be what we experience and enjoy in this year. Let's bow our heads and give thanks. Father God, we thank you that you are a gracious Lord. We are astounded that you're the God who commands us to forgive people 70 times 7 relentlessly without an upper limit because that reflects you. And we ask that we would not be on the run. That we would not be on the run from God because we're embarrassed to come back again and say, Lord, help me. Lord, forgive me. Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, accept my thanks because we feel so often it's hollow and it's empty and it's repetitive and it's relentlessly coming from ongoing sin and failure. Lord God, we thank you that you're a God of grace and that you simply want communion with us, fellowship with us, friendship, and that honest reliance on you and thanksgiving for cleansing and for being made whole. May we be whole Christians because we are grateful Christians, because we are praising Christians and thankful Christians. And may we come into Christ's presence daily and hourly in our lives, acknowledging our need and our thankfulness and the amazing work of Jesus in our lives. So help us God, we pray in these things. And each of us we pray may make that prayer today in our lives and our hearts as we start this new year. May it be a brilliant year, even if it's a dark year, may it be a brilliant year in terms of faith and grace and growth in the Kingdom of God in this beautiful city that we love.

[30 : 16] May we plant churches and may we see the church growing and expanding. And may we see God's glory in this city and may many people come to faith so that for a year just now, the celebrations for many, many people will not be hollow and empty, but will be whole because Christ is at the very heart of them. For we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.