

You may have heard the story of the man who was betrayed by a friend. He went to him and asked:

“How could you do this to me? ... Who picked you up out of the gutter? ... Who gave you your first job? ... Who lent you money and bailed you out of jail?”

The reply was:

“You did, that’s true. But what have you done for me lately?”

Our passage today seems to make gratitude... one of the scariest virtues of the human race. It might make you wonder how many blessings you have lost – due to your being ungrateful. ... (You see) what makes it scary is because it is so scarce. ... [P A U S E] ... (Our passage will demonstrate that blessings from God are associated with our being thankful... and it will also demonstrate the scarcity of gratitude.)

Both you and I could probably build a very convincing case to prove that TODAY (like never before) people show so much unappreciativeness. I know that it would not be (at all) difficult for you to imagine a spoiled little rich kid – who has it all. ... (Yeah... you know the one.) He is an Ivy league sophomore. From birth he has lacked nothing. ... He has had loving... doting parents and grandparents... the best in medical care... music lessons... tennis lessons... exotic family vacations... summer sailing school... trendy wardrobes... religious instruction... special internships and work experiences... distinctive cars... credit cards.

Yet he is an angry... ungrateful... depressed (“poor me.”) ... He appreciates nothing. ... He regards his family as a nuisance. ... He focuses on shortcomings and slights in his upbringing... holding on to grudges with

a death-grip. ... It never occurs to him that some of his happy friends have had it rougher than he.

“Ungratefulness (though it has always been endemic to the human soul) is flourishing throughout our culture — and it seems to be cresting” (writes Dr. Kent Hughes.)

And the sad part is... that we have to acknowledge that the Christian culture is NOT immune. The contemporary diseases that afflicts others attaches to Christians as well... so that in some cases (apart from perfunctory prayers of thanks at meals) no one would ever know they are grateful people - much less recipients of divine healing grace. This ought not to be. ... Scripturally... thankless Christians are a **contradiction** in terms. We are going to see *that* in today's passage (in Luke 17)...

Let's turn to our passage now... and get right to our study of it...

Luke 17:11-12

Jesus Christ healed many people of leprosy during His ministry on the earth. (We see examples in Matthew 11:5 and Luke 7:22). ... But only two of these miracles are reported in detail in the Scripture. ... In one of those miracles... Christ healed only one leper. ... But in the other recorded miracle (seen in our verses today)... Christ healed **ten** lepers.

This was no ordinary group of people. They were not dressed in elegant robes and jewels of gold and silver. No... these men were so deformed and mutilated ...that they would have scared Frankenstein... the Wolf Man... Dracula... or any other terrifying creature that frightened you as a kid. ... Some of them were missing fingers... toes... or had nubs for hands or feet because they rotted off. Others had no ears... lips... or noses. ... If you

were to approach these men... the stench of their rotting flesh and body odor would have demanded a cloth to be put over your nose or mouth. Their dreaded disease of leprosy... rots the flesh like a worm in an apple.

It was generally believed that only God could heal leprosy... so when Christ healed a leper... it gave evidence of His deity.

These ten men were a mixed group. They were Jews and (as we discover in the next verse) at least one was a Samaritan. They were bound together by their common misery - which must have lowered the barriers to their fellowship. (Remember - Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies!) ... But a common misfortune had broken down the racial and national barriers. Misery loves company... so... in their shared tragedy of having leprosy... they had forgotten they were Jews and Samaritans and remembered (only) that they were men in need. What difference does birth make if you are experiencing a living death? The label "leper" was a social death sentence. Shame left them few options for survival.

Their circumstances were so dire that you could say that these men were in the ***Fog of Desperation***. They were truly desperate men. In fact... these men were dying.

The Bible tells us they stood afar off. This was the rule for those who had leprosy in that time. Some scholars state that they had to be at a distance of 100 paces. They were to remain separate from the people because of the contagiousness of their disease. If they approached people... they had to cry out: "*Unclean! Unclean!*" and watch people run away from them. No one would be hugging them. No one would be giving them a kiss on the cheek. No one would be shaking their hand. They were rejected... (isolated

from society and family.) ... They were basically alone. You could say they were in the ***Fog of Isolation***.

Luke 17:13

Ten leprous men stood before Jesus in various stages of decay... their clothing torn in perpetual mourning... their skeletal heads uncovered... their lips unveiled. ... They looked as though they had climbed out of the graves. But they were alive... sensitive human beings... feeling souls... living in the nether world of society's fringe... while they rotted away. ... So from a safe distance they shouted the traditional plea: "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*" ... They were loud and persistent. "*Have mercy on us!*" "*Master, have mercy!*" "*Mercy please!*"

The lepers obviously have heard about Jesus' ministry and desire His help. They have a simple request and couch it in recognition of Jesus' authority. They address the master (ἐπιστάτης, *epistatēs*) by name. The word ἐπιστάτης translated "master" is the same one Peter used (Luke 5:5) and means "chief commander" ... "over-seer" ... "The One Who has power to meet needs"... They knew that Jesus was totally in command of even disease and death... and they trusted Him to help them. ... These men had hope... because Jesus was there... and they cried out for mercy.

Coming boldly to the throne of grace will help you to keep your focus in foggy times. This is what Pastor Luther Bridges did in his foggy time. Luther Bridges was born in 1884. He married Sarah Veatch and three wonderful sons were born to them. Pastor Bridges accepted an invitation to minister at a conference in Kentucky in the year 1910... so he left his family in the care of his father-in-law and made the trip to Kentucky.

While he was there... he enjoyed two wonderful weeks of ministry. The Lord blessed in a great way. The last service closed with great joy and he was excited to be called to the telephone. He couldn't wait to tell his wife about all the blessings.

When he got to the phone (however) it wasn't her voice on the long distance line. He listened in silence to the news that a fire had burned down the house of his father-in-law and his wife and all three of his sons had burned to death in the blaze.

Luther was crushed and leaned heavily on the Lord. In the fog of desperation and isolation... he kept his focus on God. In a moment of brokenness and tears... he penned these powerful words. You have heard them before - for sure.

*There's within my heart a melody
Jesus whispers sweet and low,
Fear not, I am with thee, peace, be still,
In all of life's ebb and flow.*

*Though sometimes He leads through waters deep,
Trials fall across the way,
Though sometimes the path seems rough and steep,
See His footprints all the way.*

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
Sweetest Name I know,
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.*

Let me say that you may be a Christian... but facing the fog of desperation... rejection... and isolation in your life right now... but not because you are living in sin. ... A friend or a spouse may have rejected you. You may have lost a loved one... your health... or a job.

The fog in your life is thick and you are having difficulty finding your way. Making decisions may be difficult because you are hurt... confused... or angry. ... What do you do? You do what these lepers did with Jesus. ... You cry out to the Lord! You keep your focus on Him in foggy times just like many others all throughout the Bible. (For example... I just love the Book of Daniel for bringing inspiration to these sort of times... Don't you?)

When Shadrach... Meshach... and Abednego were in the fog of desperation and isolation... when they were singled out for not bowing to the image of Nebuchadnezzar and threatened with death... they kept their focus on the Lord in foggy times. Notice Daniel 3.

Daniel 3:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Daniel (himself) also faced the fog of desperation and isolation when a law was signed that made it a capital offense to pray to the Lord. Anyone doing so... would be thrown in the den of lions. Daniel (however) continued to keep his focus in foggy times on God. ... The king (who loved Daniel) also focused on the Lord when he found out he had been tricked into executing Daniel.

Daniel 6:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed

and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God.

Daniel 6:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!”

(And... of course... God took care of Daniel and the king.)

Daniel 6:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.”

Many verses encourage us to keep our focus on the Lord... especially in the foggy times of our own lives.

Hebrews 12:2a (ESV)

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,

Psalms 16:8 (ESV)

⁸ I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

These ten lepers at this point put their focus in the right person in their foggy times. They cried out to the Lord with what strength they had left in their weakened voices, “*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*” There was no whispering here. There was no embarrassment in crying to Christ. These men were desperate and they cried to be heard by Jesus. They didn’t want

the Lord to get away. Their plea was serious... sincere... intense... insistent... passionate... and persistent.

Luke 17:13-14

Once Jesus saw them... He immediately responded. ... He would have mercy. But He would also put their faith to the test.

On this occasion (unlike in Luke chapter 5 where we saw Jesus endure scorn from the religious leaders – probably for touching the leper)... this time there was no touch. ... Neither was there the pronouncement: “*Be clean!*” ... Jesus simply told them (leprous as they were) “*Go show yourselves to the priests*”. The command was to do what a **cured leper** would do... following the regulations stipulated in Leviticus 14. The Law required examination by a priest. If they were cured... they would undergo a very expensive eight-day ceremony involving the purchase of animals to sacrifice - and **then** they could be reunited with their families.

But it was NO “light thing” for these men to seek out a priest. They would ask him to put them through a long... involved... and very costly ritual – AND THEY WERE NOT EVEN HEALED YET. They were not healed until AFTER they turned and started on their journey to find a priest. They responded without being healed first. The original language of the New Testament (literally) reads: “*in their departing... they were healed.*”

But put your own feet in their shoes. What if they had not been healed along the way? ... It would have been their own death sentence for approaching another person – if they were still leprous.

Furthermore – there is no recorded incident in existence of this ritual ever being performed (in Scripture or Jewish history.) Yet they went! ... You

might say... “Wait a minute... Pastor. I can think of two incidents in Scripture (before Jesus’ day) where a person was healed of leprosy. ... And so can I. There was Naaman (the arrogant Syrian commander who – at first - didn’t want to dip himself 7 times in a Jewish river)... and what about Miriam (the sister of Moses)...? Both of these were healed from leprosy... but there is no record that either were subjected to this Jewish ritual. Naaman wasn’t Jewish... and Miriam’s incident happened before the full establishment of the priesthood.

These ten men showed great faith... when they obeyed Christ’s instruction – *before* they experienced their miraculous healing. The ooze... rotting flesh... and pus from their wounds still existed. The Lord (however) commanded them to do something that required obedience... even though their circumstances had not changed. The lepers now enter a new situation. They go from the fog of desperation and isolation to the ***Fog of Submission.***

You will have times in your life when you will face this fog. Your situation may be difficult... distressful... discouraging... depressing... or defeating. God (however) will provide a solution in His Word to deal with your circumstance. He will give instructions or Biblical principles that need to be applied to deal with the matter in your life. This is when the fog begins to roll into your shore. This happens even though:

- * *You can’t see the end of your problem.*
- * *You can’t comprehend how your obedience to the Word will solve the situation.*
- * *You can’t see how the Lord is going to meet your need.*

** You wonder if what the Bible says is really going to work or is it a waste of time to try.*

How do you keep your focus in the fog of submission? You follow the example of the ten lepers. Trust the Lord by faith... do what He says... and leave the rest up to Him. **Times of stress often tests our faith... but obeying Him will strengthen your faith in the Lord.** ... Your obedience is what brings blessing. The ten lepers obeyed Jesus.

NOTICE: They did not ask a bunch of questions like “How?” or “Why?” They just did what they were told to do. They kept their focus on obeying the Lord. They were desperate men ready to obey.

These men kept their focus on the Lord in their foggy time. They stepped out by faith and departed from the One person they trusted and knew could heal them. That probably was not easy. ... As they began their journey toward the Temple and left Jesus behind them in the village... they must have wondered, *“What will happen now? What will the priests do to us? How is the Lord going to help us?”*

But something DID begin to happen to them. ... It was a mass healing! There were no mirrors to reflect the dramatic change... but they saw it in each other instantly. ... From cadaverous faces reemerged ears... noses... eyebrows... lashes... hairlines. ... Feet — toeless... ulcerated stubs — were suddenly whole... bursting shrunken sandals. ... Knobby appendages grew fingers. ... Barnacled skin became soft and supple. ... It was like ten new-births. The dust of a wild celebration quickly began in the bright sunlight.

Imagine the joy they felt as they pointed at one another and said, *“Your face is smooth and clean. Your wounds and sores are gone. Look at your*

fingers! Wait a minute! Look at my fingers!" They must have been so excited!

When they realized they were healed... the walk to the priests most likely turned into a run. They probably looked like a cross-country track team in training... leaving a wake of dust behind them on the road.

Showing themselves to the priests would give a great witness to the priests of the marvelous work of Jesus Christ in healing the lepers. When the lepers told the priests how they were healed... the priest would examine the lepers rigorously because they did not like Christ... but the more they examined the lepers... the more they would have to admit that Christ did a marvelous job of healing and must be the Son of God as He claimed to be.

Luke 17:15-16

It is with marked emphasis that the evangelist adds: "*and he was a Samaritan!*" As if to say: "*Think of it - a Samaritan!*" (A man belonging to a race hated by the Jews.) But *this* Samaritan is different; by God's grace... of course. ... This Samaritan goes back and thanks ... a Jew(!) - which would have caused the Lord's Jewish disciples to wince. ... The Samaritan (who was the least likely to behave in a godly way) outshined his Jewish counterparts.

To this healed man... the ceremonial clean bill of health could wait. His spiritual obligation overrode his ceremonial need. So the Samaritan and the Jews parted company. ... The thankful Samaritan knew he had "two to thank (God and Jesus.) He did not know that the two were one."

First he had been LOUDLY thanking God. Verse 15 said: "One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God *in a loud voice.*"

Earlier he had loudly pled for healing... and now he was loud with his praise. The Greek for “loud voice” is recognizable to our English ears... because it is the two words from which we get *megaphone*... here reversed *phonēs megalēs*. He was mega-voiced in his praise to God.

Then he thanked Jesus: “He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan” (v. 16 says). He literally “fell upon his face” at Jesus’ feet. At the very least... he recognized Jesus as an agent of God. But *more* likely... he realized that Jesus was **king**. The Samaritans were well-acquainted with the messianic Scriptures... and this man saw Jesus in that light. ... He returned to Jesus with a heart giving glory to God and thanks to Jesus. ... He recognized God’s power in Christ.

When the lepers realized that they had been healed... these ten men now faced another foggy situation... that we sometimes face. ... Now they are confronted with the ***Fog of Celebration***.

What? ... That’s right... they were in the fog of celebration (a fog that you and I – once again – sometimes face.) ... When you are on top of the mountain (when everything is going great) ... when achievement or victory has been won... or a huge need has been met - we will face the fog of celebration. ... The fog of celebration can ***cloud*** your focus on the Lord... because you are focused on the celebration.

For some people... the relief of a burden or the answer to a prayer... puts them in a position where they are less desperate. Their need is not so great. They are doing pretty good. In the midst of the celebration... the Lord is forgotten. Their focus shifts from the burden... to getting on with life or accomplishing a goal or plan without saying: “*Thank you*” to the Lord.

Is this a common problem? ... Oh my - you better believe it! ... How many times has the Lord answered your prayer (He blessed you in a tremendous way... or met your enormous need)... and you forgot to say “Thank you” to Him? ... Nine lepers were so excited about getting on with their lives and getting home to their families... that they did not feel it was necessary to go back and thank the Lord. ... They could have joined this Samaritan.

I am almost positive when the Samaritan started to return... they asked him: “*Where are you going? What are you doing?*” Wouldn’t you be asking those questions? ... I believe he probably said something like: “*I am going back to thank Jesus.*” (And if so)... right then... they **all** could have joined him... But they didn’t. ... They lost their focus in the fog of celebration. ... The Samaritan (however) did not.

The Samaritan realized the importance of being grateful. Unfortunately... many of us - Christians - are weak in this area of our lives. Most Christians have not learned to say “*Thank you*” and be grateful for what God and what others have done for them. Too often... we are content **to enjoy the gift but we forget the Giver.** We are quick to pray... but slow to praise. We tend to lose our focus in the fog of celebration. God wants us to be grateful people like the one leper.

Thankfulness should be in the Christian’s heart. ... (OK... I am going to get very serious... now.)... Why do you come to church on Sunday? ... Do you come here to worship God and thank Him for all He has done for you? ... At the very center... the very heart of your worship... you need to be thanking Him.

Psalm 103:2-3 (ESV)

² *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,* ³ *who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,*

Psalm 107:8 (ESV)

⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

Luke 17:17-18

Vague gratitude to God is not an adequate response – Christ wanted their hearts! Vague gratitude to God is not an adequate response from us – or them! Christ wants our hearts. Yet... Sunday after Sunday we give Him only a vague gratitude. ... And we are about to see in the next verse (verse 19) that by failing to glorify God and returning to thank Jesus... they missed the greatest possible moment of their existence.

Luke 17:19

The Greek in the last part of verse 19 is literally, “*Your faith has saved you.*” It is the studied opinion of the three most prominent scholars of Luke’s Gospel (including one that my seminary professors would quote very frequently – Dr. I. Howard Marshall)... that Jesus declared in Luke 17:19 that “*His faith has been the means of his cure and his salvation.*” The man who returned received healing AND salvation (eternal life) – whereas the others didn’t. ... As much of a foreigner as he might be... this man is now sent off by Jesus as a person who has experienced the salvation that Jesus came to bring. None of the others (despite their new-found freedom from leprosy) receives this special blessing.”

Jesus' words were clear: only the Samaritan who returned to praise God and offer thanksgiving to Christ himself had saving faith. Indeed... his gratitude and praise to God were **signs** of his saving faith.

There are eternal lessons here for us. Certainly we must understand that no one is saved by virtue of having a pleasant... optimistic... or thankful spirit. ... Jesus is not teaching salvation by proper attitude. But Jesus is teaching that **where there is true faith... there are profoundly thankful hearts.**

The hearts of those who do not know Christ are ungrateful. Speaking of the unsaved... listen to Paul's illuminated description of them:

Romans 1:21 (ESV)

*²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God **or give thanks to him**, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Paul designates a lack of thanksgiving as a hallmark of a person who is not saved. ... And in another letter Paul distinguished how horrible mankind would become in the last days. One of those distinctions would be a lack of gratitude.

2 Timothy 3:1-2 (ESV)

¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

Ingratitude is a mark of someone who is not a Christian. But **where there is true faith... there are profoundly thankful hearts.**

We can always find reason for gratitude before God. Matthew Henry (the famous Bible commentator in the 1800's) was robbed of his wallet once. He wrote in his diary that night all the things he was thankful about:

- First, that he had never been robbed before.
- Second, that though they took his wallet, they did not take his life.
- Third, because even though they took it all, it wasn't very much.
- Finally, because he was the one who was robbed and not the one who did the robbing.

The ten who acted in faith were healed... but just one came back and praised God and was grateful.

I love the story of the immigrant shopkeeper whose son came to see him one day complaining, "Dad, I don't understand how you run this store. You keep your accounts payable in a cigar box. Your accounts receivable are on a spindle. All your cash is in the register. You never know what your profits are." "Son, let me tell you something," answered his dad. "When I arrived in this land all I owned was the pants I was wearing. Now your sister is an art teacher. Your brother is a doctor. You are a CPA. Your mother and I own a house and a car and this little store. Add that all up and subtract the pants and there is your profit." A well person has a sense of gratitude for any and all good fortune.

Keep your focus in foggy times! Keep your focus in the fog of desperation... isolation... submission... and the fog of celebration.