

ONLY ONE OUT OF TEN

A sermon for the Sunday before Thanksgiving (11/19/2006)

By Dr. David R. Mains

ONLY ONE OUT OF TEN OVERVIEW

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Subject: When Christ acts graciously on our behalf.

Desired Response: Express a proper attitude of thanks.

How To: Write out 50 items for which you would sincerely thank Jesus were he here in the flesh.

How Long: Finish the list of 50 by Thanksgiving Day or sooner. Begin the exercise in the time provided during the sermon.

Sermon in a Sentence: When Christ acts graciously on our behalf, He expects us to express a proper attitude of thanks.

Subject:

*How do you get under the skin of the most gracious man who ever lived?

Jesus never sinned. So he wasn't peevish or characterized by an ill temper. But in the passage I'll read momentarily, you can tell from his remarks that his expectations exceeded the response he got. Before looking at the nine verses that tell the story, let me first provide you with some background on what's about to happen.

I suppose today one of the words people most dread hearing is cancer. Though progress has been made in its treatment, the term is still frightening. Some of you here have wrestled with the dire ramifications of being told, "Our tests show that the tumor is malignant."

In Biblical times the big scare word was leprosy. It was a double whammy because the disease not only disfigured you physically, it ostracized you socially. Regardless of your status, you no longer had the option of living with the general society. Instead, from now on you are literally an outcast.

In Jesus' day, there was no upside to leprosy. No medicine was available like it is now. Today, leprosy patients are not usually isolated either.

In his book "The Cross and the Crown", Frank Slaughter writes:

** Wherever he went the leper was required to announce his presence with the mournful cry of "Unclean! Unclean!", a signal for all to draw away lest they be contaminated by the dread scourge. Lepers could mingle only with their own kind and could not enter the Temple at Jerusalem nor any walled city on pain of being lashed with not less than forty lashes. Since all religious authorities admitted to being utterly without power to cure the leper, what help he obtained could come only from God.*

* With a feel for the hopelessness of their situation, let's now look in as ten male lepers attempt to make contact with the Son of God. This is Luke 17, verses 11-19:

** 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 ¹³and 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? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*

What happened here was more amazing than you catch with a single reading of the text. Your odds this week of winning the state lottery are better than your chances back then of being healed of leprosy. Although having all the winning number seems impossible, there's an ever-so-slim gamble that you could. Two thousand years ago, an individual with leprosy was in an impossible situation. What could alter such despairing circumstances? Not a thing. Absolutely nothing. Nada!

It's not easy to live without hope, without the slightest possibility that tomorrow can be a better day, that events have a chance, however slight, of turning around. But that's the locked-in position in which these unclean companions found themselves.

* At least one was a Samaritan. The ten lived together on the border between Samaria and the Jewish territory of Galilee. Though Jews and Samaritans didn't have any social interaction, when you had leprosy all such distinctions were forgotten. It was good just to have friends, someone to talk to, others to help in the mad scramble of staying alive.

Now into the gloom of the forlorn existence of leper colonies came incredible reports of miracles being performed just like in earlier days. A maverick rabbi from Nazareth named Jesus was drawing great crowds. Some believed this attractive young man was the long awaited Jewish Messiah, the anointed one from God. In fact, part of his popular appeal was his healing of the sick; including (would you believe) isolated occasions when someone was actually cleansed of ... leprosy.

It must have been that the ears of these ten tingled when they first heard of such news. Now their lips could speak about nothing else. Contact with the Christ became an obsession. But how? Lepers couldn't attend one of his public meetings. Fortunately, Jesus traveled quite a bit. Maybe they could catch him between stops. If all of them called his name at the same time, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." – possibly that would get his attention. They must have realized making such a request was a long shot and undoubtedly they knew that what they were asking for was nothing short of a miracle.

The actual interchange between the two parties was brief and took place at a distance. Once the "gang of ten" had his attention, Jesus responded by shouting back, "Go show yourselves to the priests." That's what a healed person was supposed to do according to the Old Testament law. So the encounter was over almost before it was begun.

What was wonderful is that somewhere along the way, as these pitiful vagabonds headed to where the priests stayed, they came to realize their miracle had been granted. Their white spots

were gone. The clothes were still ragged and dirty, but their bodies were free of this cursed disease. Hey, it couldn't be, nevertheless it was so. They had been healed – all ten of them.

Can you picture in your imagination these adult males jumping for joy like little boys, slapping each other on the back, laughing raucously, checking each other's bodies for any places that might have been missed, and then jabbering, "Aren't we the lucky ones now!"

We can understand their excitement. What we can't understand is that only one of them returned to say "Thank you". Apparently, he didn't even go on to see the priest first. The text reads, *"When he saw he was healed, (he) came back, praising God in a loud voice. (Then) he threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him."* His body language and his words are the epitome of gratitude and worship. This was genuine thanks being expressed, no question about it. *"And he was a Samaritan,"* one of those you have to figure was the least likely to respond as he did.

The surprised remark of our Lord was *"Were not all ten healed?"* I mean, only one out of ten is here? Where are the other nine? It's unconscionable that they haven't come running back too. Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? If what I did for them was a small thing, I could understand their neglect. But considering how huge a favor the other nine were also granted, the fact that they didn't join their friend here in expressing thanks is a bit shocking.

Response:

If this were an isolated occurrence, we could all wag our heads and say "Unbelievable. How sad for Jesus. And how sad for these nameless other nine guys." But my suspicion is that this scene is played out time and again, especially in America and even on the very day we call Thanksgiving.

* The point of this passage is not all that hard to figure out. When Christ acts graciously on our behalf, he expects us to express a proper attitude of thanks. Shall I say that again? When Christ acts graciously on our behalf, He expects us to express a proper attitude of thanks.

Most of us in attendance today were born in the U.S.A. Though not flawless as a nation, the truth is that many in the world still see this as the great land of opportunity. They would trade citizenship with us in an instant. Compared to their living situations, Americans have it made.

Am I saying this is without question the best country in the whole world? Not at all. But it certainly knows more than its share of blessings. Whether deserved or not, God has “shed His grace” on America.

Recognizing how fortunate we are, have we as a people returned to Jesus, throwing ourselves at his feet, saying thank you and praising him in a loud voice?

My guess is that naturalized citizens are better at this than the native born, and earlier generations of Americans were probably more inclined toward this type of behavior than are those of this present day. “Wait a minute,” someone protests, “Haven’t we as a nation set aside a whole day specifically to say ‘thank you’ to God for His graciousness to us? Maybe you should preach a message like this sometime in February or March when thanks is not so much on everybody’s minds.”

The point I’m actually making is that this Thanksgiving week I’m not so sure all that many Americans will be truly thankful to God for His graciousness to them. Unfortunately, it’s relatively easy to spend this national holiday stuffing ourselves with food while basically forgetting about the Lord and all he’s done on our behalf. I mean, is a quick prayer before diving into the turkey and dressing the total spiritual involvement our forefathers had in mind? Was watching football on

television or spending a couple hours at the movies to be the main event of this special Thursday? To earlier generations I believe that would be unconscionable.

It was less than a year after settling in this new land that the early colonists celebrated their first Thanksgiving. During the harsh first winter they had lost nearly half of their original party. But they were still thankful to God for this new start on life. Their tradition of a feast, marked by special seasons of prayer and the celebration of God's goodness, gradually spread from Massachusetts to many of the other New England colonies.

Jump forward about a century and a half and we witness our first president, George Washington, issuing a general proclamation naming November 26, 1789 as a onetime day of national thanksgiving. Then it's another 75 years before Abraham Lincoln, during the sobering days of the Civil War, proclaims the last Thursday of November, 1863, as "a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father." This tradition held until 1939, when F.D.R., wanting to help business by lengthening the shopping period before Christmas, pushed up Thanksgiving Day to one week earlier. Finally, in 1941, Congress voted that it would always be the fourth Thursday of November that was our legal holiday. This year that's this coming Thursday. Re-said, four days from now will be Thanksgiving Day 2005 in this land. But again, I'm wondering how much giving of thanks to God will actually take place.

At this point, let me quickly inform everyone tracking with me that I have no intention of driving us down Guilt Street. Writing a simple thank you note for a gift or an act of kindness can sometimes be the hardest task in the world for some people. If that's the case, what method do you then use to let God know how grateful you are for all he's done on your behalf?

The Lord is aware that truly talented song writers are few and far between, and not too many people make their living writing poetry now-a-days. If Jesus were only bodily present in our world, who wouldn't run to him, fall at his feet and shower him with expressions of praise and

thanks? That would be easy. But it's awkward to attempt to duplicate that act when there's nobody there to physically cling to.

My suspicion is that the problem is not so much a matter of purposeful neglect, as it is one of knowing how to go about doing what's appropriate, especially when we aren't sure about the proper protocol.

Yes, we know that expressing our thanks is important. Scripture declares that "to whom much is given, much is also required." So, we don't want to get under Jesus' skin by clumping ourselves with the nine lepers who were granted so much, but never even came back to say thank you. Yet, how we're supposed to go about expressing our thanks is the dilemma we're faced with.

How To:

Here's my suggestion. It will take more than a couple minutes, but not a huge number of them. You have probably already noticed in your bulletin the insert marked 1 to 50. Its heading reads: * "If Jesus were here bodily, I would want to thank him for . . ." Hold up those sheets for me to see. Thank you.

Now listen, sometime today I want you to write down at least 25 items for which you would thank Jesus were he here in the flesh.

Caution, this is not a get-it-done-as-fast-as-possible test. So you don't write down the names of all the different people in your extended family. Our beautiful grandchildren – that's okay as one item.

What you're doing is making a list of specifics for which you would thank Jesus were He somewhere in the area nearby. So they can't be stupid items like "my new socks" or the "tank of

gasoline". However, you could include "thank you for more than enough clothes to wear" or "for a reliable car to get me places."

More illustrations. Thank you Jesus for ...

- Good health
- Forgiveness of my sins
- A roof over my head
- For educational opportunities
- The privilege of prayer
- A steady income

Thank you Jesus for ...

- My five senses
- A stable government
- Also the opportunity to vote my conscience
- The joy of giving to you work
- The Lord's Table
- A soul mate
- PEACE in our land

Again, thank you for ...

- My church – not perfect but a good one
- The chance to travel
- Assurance about life after death
- Your patience with my spiritual progress
- Beautiful stars at night
- The place you have prepared for me in heaven
- Even for problems that help me grow spiritually

How Long:

I've quickly suggested over twenty already. Before this Sunday ends, you're to be half-way through your list of fifty. If Jesus were here in person, I would want to thank him for ... and sometime today you should have at least 25 items on your list.

I believe all of us can make it to fifty, but it won't be that easy. I chose that number because it takes a while to come up with that many. The last eight or ten are the hardest.

But you have Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday to complete the assignment. Doing so ought to keep you in a thankful mood. If you're anything like me, your mind will stay alert to obvious items that you should include.

What if I gave you two minutes of my sermon time right now so you can get started? You ought to be able to write down between five and ten ideas anyway. If you didn't bring something to write with, at least get your brain working on the assignment, okay?

(two minutes of quiet)

You've had just two minutes to get started on your list. To get it up to 25 items of thanks, shouldn't take more than another focused ten minutes sometime later today.

Can you add another ten on Monday?

Then eight more on Tuesday?

And complete the last seven on Wednesday?

Because most of you won't work on Thursday, why not start the day by thanking Jesus for making a special stop at your house on Thanksgiving morning. Tell him how perfect His timing is,

because you have just written out a list of 50 reasons for being thankful to Him. Then go over your list, elaborating on some of the items if you want.

“For example, number four here. Well, You remember the despairing circumstances I was in. No one knew how to help. They all said nothing could be done. Absolutely nothing. And that’s when you came through Jesus. When I had no hope, suddenly it was like I had been granted a miracle. Pardon my tears, Jesus, but it’s like you shed your grace on me and mine, and I’m so deeply grateful.”

Has Christ ever done something big for you like that? Then please be ready this week to join with those who express to him their sincere thanks and praise.

You can even share a few of the listings at the Thanksgiving table if you feel it’s appropriate. This year, if our Lord wonders where all the others are He helped who haven’t said “thank you”, let none of that sad group be from this congregation.

* In the Anglican Eucharistic liturgy every Sunday the celebrant says, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” The people then respond, “It is right to give Him thanks and praise.” Can you repeat that live with me? “It is right to give Him thanks and praise.” Let’s try it. It is right to give Him thanks and praise. Again, It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Now, every time I pause momentarily and motion with my hands, say it again.

(PAUSE)

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to You, Father Almighty.

(PAUSE)

* I Thessalonians 5:18 "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

(PAUSE)

* Psalm 107:1 "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good."

(PAUSE)

Especially give thanks to the Lord, this Thanksgiving week.

(PAUSE)

Let us be like the man with leprosy who was healed by our Lord, and returned quickly to say, "Thank You Jesus".

(PAUSE)

Even if it means some extra minutes beyond this service, we will find them, because giving thanks to God is a proper thing to do.

(PAUSE)

* Psalm 100, verse 4, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, give thanks to Him and praise His name."

*The instruments introduce a song like "Give thanks with a grateful heart. Give thanks to the Holy One." etc.

(PAUSE)

* Psalm 28, verse 7 states, "I will give thanks to Him in song." Let's do that now.