Where Are We Among the Ten?

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On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ***12*** *As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance,* ***13*** *they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"* ***14*** *When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean.* ***15*** *Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.* ***16*** *He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.* ***17*** *Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?* ***18*** *Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"* ***19*** *Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well*." (Luke 17:11-19)

1. Thank You Notes at VBS

On the fourth day of 2019 VBS, one of the children made "a thank you note" and gave it to Ruth and Carol to express her thanks for the refreshments. How thoughtful!

Last year Rohi, Bourne UMC pastor Tim's daughter, gave me a thank you note. I was so touched by her love. She wrote, "Dear Pastor Joe and Christine and Swift Memorial UMC, thank you for hosting this fun occasion for our children and their friends (VBS). I love you and will never forget you. You are my closest friend and I love you. Pastor Joe, I will take care of you. Christine, please call me when pastor Joe gets sick. with love, Rohi." As you may know, she has a down syndrome. Yet she is full of love and excited to help other people. She was full of gratefulness for our VBS.

2. Ten Lepers Were Clean

Today's New Testament lesson talks about what happened to Jesus and his disciples on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples are passing through the border between Samaria and Galilee. When they enter a village, they meet ten lepers. The lepers probably heard about the story of a man who was cleaned of leprosy by Jesus as written in Luke 5:12-15. The lepers know who Jesus is. When they meet Jesus, they say, "***Jesus, Master, have mercy on us***." The lepers address Jesus as "master" indicating a personal recognition of his authority. They humbly ask for his help. Jesus says to them, "***Go and show yourselves to the priests***." In Luke 5:13, Jesus touches a leper and says, "be clean." Then Jesus tells the man to go and show himself to the priest. However, in Luke 17, Jesus just tells the ten lepers, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." Luke does not explain why Jesus sends them to the priests without healing them.

On their way to the priests, the ten lepers discover they are cleaned. They would have been filled with joy and excitement. The lepers would likely sing and

dance, holding each other's hands. The lepers would have been waiting for the day that they would be clean for a long time. Their dreams would finally come true. According to Mosaic law, lepers were supposed to stay away from other people because leprosy was contagious. If the leper would come near other people, they were required to announce their presence by calling, "unclean, unclean." Leviticus 13:45-46 says, ***"he (leper) shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." …. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.***"

Now the lepers who are cleaned do not have to announce that they are unclean. They do not have to live alone. They can go back home and live with their families. The ten former lepers were full of joy. The men probably would discuss what to do next. Some of them would want to go to the priests to be declared clean as was the tradition. Others would want to go home first and tell their family about their healing. Luke says one of them praises God, comes back to Jesus, and throws himself at Jesus' feet and thanks Jesus. Luke points out that this man is a Samaritan.

Who are the Samaritans? The Samaritans were despised by Jews in the time of Jesus. Why? The Samaritan ancestors were Jews, but married the Assyrians, becoming a mixed race. Samaritans were the descendants of intermarried Jews and Assyrians after Israel's exile in the northern kingdom. Jews did not consider them Jews and hated the Samaritans.

When the Samaritan leper comes back, Jesus asks the Samaritan, "***were not ten made clean?" But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"*** Jesus heals all ten lepers, but only one returns to thank him. When I was in Korea, I was able to see lepers personally. The people watched their bodies decay. Their fingers, eyes, and noses often would be severely impacted. This story reminds us that we are ungrateful even when we receive God's greatest gifts.

3. Thankful for What?

Why do you think the Samaritan returned to Jesus and thanked him? For what is he so thankful? Does the man return simply because of his healing from leprosy? Certainly, the Samaritan leper is grateful for the healing. There is no question about it. However, what makes him more grateful than other lepers is that the man experiences an encounter with the righteousness and justice of God. As a Samaritan, he was despised by Jews. However, he is treated equally with other Jewish lepers by Jesus. The Samaritan sees God in Jesus.

Samaritans were outsiders to the people of God. Even Jesus says that a Samaritan is a foreigner (verse 18). Despite the outsider status, God heals ten lepers including the Samaritan. God's mercy is not limited to the Jews, but is extended to every human being. The Samaritan experiences the amazing love of God in Jesus.

4. Get Up and Go

The passage ends with Jesus' command to the Samaritan: "***Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well***." "***Go on your way***" probably means "go to the priests." Even though the Samaritan leper had been healed, he needs to be declared that he was clean by the priest. "***Your faith has made you well***" would mean that he has received not only the gift of physical healing but also the blessing of salvation through the Messiah. He experiences that God's love and grace is for everyone, even for Samaritans. He learns that Jesus is the son of God who has come to save the world. He gives thanks to Jesus and glory to God.

5. Are We Thankful?

If you and I were one of the lepers, would we be among nine or would we be the one? What makes the difference among the ten lepers in their behavior when they discover that they are clean? The Samarian knows that his healing is from Jesus who sent them to the priests. Immediately the Samaritan praises God and comes back to Jesus and gives thanks, but others may take for granted.

Psalm 66 is called "A song of Praise and Thanksgiving." This psalm introduces the history of what God has done on behalf of Israel. The author invites all to join themselves to this story. Verse 5 says, "***Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals***." The writer encourages us to hear of what God has done for Israel in the exodus and the entry into the promised land. Then he invites the people to praise God, who has sustained the people through many hardships.

I am sure that many of us may know the hymn, "When upon life's billows." The lyrics say, "When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed, when you are discouraged, thinking all is lost, count your many blessings, name them one by one. And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done. Count your blessings; name them one by one. Count your blessing; see what God hath done…"

This hymn was written by Johnson Oatman, Jr, who was born April 21, 1856 in Lumberton, NJ. He was a Methodist pastor. He wrote 5,000 songs. In this hymn, he reminds us that we often forget about giving thanks to the Lord.

6. Conclusion

What do we learn from the story of the ten lepers? The story reminds us that we can take God for granted and do not recognize the gifts of God. We do not always praise him and give thanks to the Lord. We need to remind ourselves of who God is when we lapse into a state of ingratitude, taking for granted all of the blessings and comforts we have received.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says, "***give thanks in all circumstance, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus***." Paul encourages the Thessalonians and us to give thanks always. Why do you think Paul says this to the

Thessalonians? The Thessalonian Christians were persecuted by the Jews. They were disappointed because Jesus did not return by that time. Their friends and relatives died before Christ's return. Many Christians were discouraged. They were not grateful to the Lord at all. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the promise of Jesus' return. He tells them how they should live in the meanwhile. Paul says that they should give thanks always because God will always take care of them no matter what.

7. Application

How often do we praise God and give thanks to the Lord? Once a year, once a month, once a week, once a day or more often. For what are we grateful? We often experience the miracles like the Samaritan leper did. This morning let me share with you a miracle story that we experienced. As you know, my daughter is studying New Testament in Cambridge, England. She did not expect to be a doctoral student this fall but she applied anyway in faith. She learned that she was accepted and needed to raise the money for tuition and room and board. The amount was huge not and we prayed for God's guidance. We are so grateful for Sara Connolly's thoughtfulness, hosting brunches at her Gazebo to support my daughter. We thank the congregation for your prayers. We were not sure how my daughter would get the money she needs. My daughter told us recently that your prayers were answered. She was able to raise the funds for school in Korea. It is a true miracle and I am so grateful for the blessing.

What I am really thankful is my daughter's trust in the Lord. She says that studying in England is not what she wants to do. She says that studying in England is God's idea. If she chooses, she would not go to England to study. She would rather stay in Korea, supporting missionaries. However, she felt that God would want her to study to teach missionaries in the future. That's why she was not anxious about the decision of school admission. She did not worry about the money. She just wants to see how God makes her study possible. Christine and I discover that God works behind the scenes and provides what she needs for her education. We praise God for using our daughter for His Kingdom and give thanks to God for His provision.

The greatest blessing for the Samaritan leper is not the healing from leprosy. The leper discovers how much God loves him through Jesus Christ. The leper finds the Messiah. Each one of us has things that we are thinking about and are hoping to see get done. Sometimes we experience something we do not want to happen. The question is how much can we trust in the Lord and be thankful for all the gifts that God has already provided and that God would provide in the future. Are we among the nine or the one who came back to Jesus and gave him thanks? I pray that all of us praise God and give thanks to our Lord always for his amazing love in Jesus Christ. Amen.