

## Let Your Thanks Be Loud And Long

Thanksgiving is a holiday which brings people together. They gather together around the table, around the turkey, around the TV for the football games. But, imagine that all your friends and family were gathered there around the warm food and joyful conversation, but you were not there. You were not there. But it wasn't because you were working or away by choice. No, you were away because you could never see them again. Leprosy was a horrible disease. It was ugly. It was contagious. But, it separated you from everyone around you. This evening we meet ten men who have leprosy: *"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 and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'"* (Luke 17:11–13 NIV)

These ten men had horrible skin diseases. But, even worse, they had been separated from their families for months and probably even years. They had mothers. They had fathers. They had brothers. They had sisters. Some of them might have even had children. But, they could only see them and be a part of their lives from a distance. Their leprosy led to a great need. When they heard that Jesus was in their area, they came out to him. They stood at a distance and shouted out in a loud voice.

Their leprosy led to desperation. Their desperation led them to shout with loud voices. And notice then what this loud shouting led to: *"When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed."* (Luke 17:14 NIV) They asked—they begged Jesus to have mercy on them. And he did. He told them to show themselves to the priests. That was the Old Testament law. When people were cured they were supposed to show themselves to the priest. And if they were cured of their infectious disease, they were allowed to return home to their families. And that's exactly what happened. They were walking to the priest and they were healed.

It would be a suitable ending right here. We could stop. We could marvel at their need. We could bask in the mercy and overflowing generosity of our Savior. But these words continue. And they teach us some very important truths: *"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.'"* (Luke 17:15–19 NIV)

Here we have an amazing privilege. So very often we hear about Jesus' miracles. And we might ask ourselves what happened after the miracle. And here we actually get to see what the rest of the story is. The ten are healed. And one of them turns back. And here we find some beautiful, amazing words. Luke tells us: *"One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice"*

One of them men turned back. And from the moment he turned back he praised God in a loud voice<sup>1</sup>. This is definitely an event we have to picture in our minds. Picture a man who is healed. And because he is so thankful he shouts out praises to God above. And he doesn't just praise God once. No, he *continues* to praise God again and again until he finally finds Jesus again. The man falls at Jesus' feet and continues to thank Jesus<sup>2</sup> again and again.

At first, when I read these words I was so overwhelmed with joy. This man had what no other person could give him. Jesus healed his leprosy. And instead of going back to his family, what did he do? He turned away from his family to find Jesus and thank him. I was overwhelmed with joy. But then, as quickly as I was filled with joy, I was filled with pain. I found deep pain in these words because very often my thanks is neither loud, nor is it long. And very often I join the other nine instead of the thankful one.

Why is this? Why is it that, when we look into ourselves we see so very many reasons to give glory and thanks to Jesus, our Savior and God, but we don't. It was a powerful reminder to me just how selfish and powerful my sinful nature is. And it shows how powerful it is. It flexes its muscles every time I assume I deserve what is good. I remember the first time I went to the cafeteria at Northwestern College. There was a big vat of mashed potatoes. And I hadn't had mashed potatoes for a long time. So, I asked for a generous portion of potatoes. I went to my table and sat down. I thanked God for the food I was about to eat. And then, to my shock and horror, the white, pasty stuff on my plate was not potatoes. It *looked* like potatoes. But it tasted like the table it was resting on. It was at that moment that I realized how good I had it when I was growing up. Every Sunday Mom and Dad made fresh potatoes which we grew from our own garden. Week after week I ate them and I was not thankful because I assumed that I deserved them.

<sup>1</sup> μετὰ φωνῆς μεγάλης δοξάζων

<sup>2</sup> δοξάζων...εὐχαριστῶν

If this is true with something as simple and ordinary as mashed potatoes, how much more is it true when we look at spiritual gifts? This man was healed of a horrible disease, but so was I. His was on the outside, but mine is on the inside. This disease infects my body and my soul. This disease is sin. And there is this truly evil part of me which *assumes* that I deserve this healing because I am Steve Bauer.

Our sinful nature makes us assume that we deserve the gifts that God gives to us by his mercy. But it gets even worse. Our sinful nature makes us despise the good gifts God does give to us. I remember a particular meal my mom used to make. It had this bizarre mixture of pork, sauerkraut, carrots and caraway seed. It was a recipe for what *not* to put together in a meal. And when I saw her making it I begged her to make Swiss Steak, my favorite recipe. But she made what she made. It was good for me. And it didn't taste nearly as bad as I told myself that it did. But, my response was to deny, disdain and despise it.

If this is true of mashed potatoes and pork, how much more true is it when it comes to spiritual gifts? Think of how we are tempted to treat the LORD's Supper. We like sharing in this special meal with our fellow members of our church. We like receiving forgiveness through the bread and wine and body and blood. But, we don't like the other part of the LORD's Supper. We don't like to practice *Closed* communion. Luther practiced Closed communion<sup>3</sup>. The ancient Christian church did as well. But, most importantly, God's word moves us to practice it out of love—love for Jesus who gave this precious gift to us, out of love for those who come forward to the LORD's Supper. Because we cannot see what is inside people's hearts, we practice closed communion, so that they do not receive it to their harm and so that we are united—not despite God's word, but because of it. That is why we practice closed communion. And it doesn't matter how biblical, how loving, how caring it is, our sinful natures are so powerful that they drive us to doubt and then despise the good gifts he has given to us.

As I looked at these words I saw a man whose thanks were loud and long. And my thanks are so very often non-existent or simply replaced by complaints. How is it then that I or you or anyone else would have any reason to have any sense of joy or thanksgiving on this night?

These words give us two huge reasons to thank our Savior. First, when we see how powerful our sinful nature is, then is when we appreciate and cling to God's mercy. What is mercy? Mercy is that unique, amazing love that God has where he loves us not because we are so lovable, but rather because we are so *un-lovable*. He looks at us like you might look at a puppy freezing in a cold, icy winter's night. It is helpless to save itself. So, someone else must reach out and rescue it. And that is what God has done for us. Jesus has forgiven our sins, yes even those sins we commit when we are thankless and spiteful. And Jesus showed his great mercy. These ten men ran to Jesus. We were running away from him. And yet, in his mercy, he died for our sins.

We have every reason to thank him because of his mercy. But, in our final verse, we find another reason: "*Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'*" (Luke 17:19 NIV) Our translation here uses the phrase 'has made you well', but in the greek it doesn't use the word 'healed.' It uses the word 'saved'<sup>4</sup>. His faith rescued him—not just from the leprosy on the outside. It also rescued him from the leprosy of sin on the inside. And here is where we see God's mercy. This man didn't ask for faith and he didn't earn it. It was a gift, a free and wonderful gift from Jesus. That is why Jesus could say: "*Rise and go; your faith has made you well.*" (Luke 17:19 NIV)

Jesus has shown his great mercy not just to this man, but also to you. He has washed you clean of your leprous sins. He has given to you this great gift of faith so that you know your Savior Jesus and all that he has done for you. So then, my brothers and sisters, let your thanks be loud. Let your thanks be loud in your singing, in your praying. Let it be loud in your growing in the faith and your sharing of the faith. Let your thanks build inside of you and pour out the top.

And don't just let it be loud, let your thanksgiving also be long. Just think of this man who, when he was healed, came back to Jesus. And step by step, minute by minute, he glorified God and thanked Jesus. Follow in the steps of this healed man, for you too walk toward Jesus. You will not meet him on the border of Samaria and Galilee. No, instead you will meet him when he calls you to him in death or on Judgement Day. You are day by day, minute by minute walking toward heaven. So then, let your thanks not just be loud, let it be long. Let your thanks be a marathon of praise now. And let it be an eternity of thanks in heaven. For Jesus has shown his mercy to you and placed this great gift of faith in you. Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup>St Louis edition 13a,303f

<sup>4</sup>ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε