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Sermon Notes

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## **The Sweet Grace of Thankfulness**

**Luke 17:11-19**

So we just passed the holiday of Thanksgiving...

A confusing holiday for our deeply secular society

NFL commentators said it was a day for us to thank each other

Revisionist politically correct historians said it was a day for the Pilgrims to thank the Wampanoag Indians for their help!!

But the Pilgrim's knew better... they had sunk down on their knees in the wet sand of Cape Cod in December of 1620 and had thanked God for their safe passage...

And after barely surviving the perilous winter of 1620-21, they had now experienced a rich harvest and knew God was with them... that first feast was a time of joyful thanksgiving to God

But what about us? Do we thank God as we should?

What should I thank God for??

***Ephesians 5:20 Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ***

When should I thank God?

***Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus***

1 Thessalonians 5:18

So for everything and in every circumstance...

FOR EVERYTHING????

Illus.: Corrie ten Boom, a godly Dutch Christian, and her sister, Betsie, were incarcerated during WWII in Ravensbruck, a German concentration camp; despite her strong faith in God, she was deeply struggling with depression at their arrest by the Germans.

Ravensbruck was one of the worst concentration camps in Germany. Fleas and lice were so thick that upon entering the bunkroom, one became swarmed in them. The stench of

burning flesh from those that were murdered without warning was a constant stare into the face of death. The food was one half pound of bread and one half liter of soup per day. The work was so hard that the women had swollen legs and were losing circulation in no time.

To make matters worse, the women fought one another for everything. They cursed, pushed, and shoved each other. Even if someone was simply stepped on or bumped. Rarely donated clothes and blankets caused horrible uproars. The few nurses who had access to items such as soap, vitamins, and underwear charged prices such as a week's bread ration for undergarments, 25 guilders for soap, and two days' bread for any pills.

Betsie urged her to thank God for everything. "Everything?" she asked. "Yes, everything!" Corrie stubbornly said, "Well, one thing I know I can't thank God for are these horrible fleas." The insects were chewing her scalp and flesh and making her utterly miserable. But Betsie said, "Corrie, by faith you should thank God for the fleas too."

Corrie and Betsie had smuggled a Bible into the camp and traded it back and forth during the day. If the guards found one or caught anyone having meetings, they were to be executed. At first, the women held these meetings very timidly. But as the weeks wore on and no guards came into the bunkroom, they grew bolder. Corrie marveled at this.

Why was it that no guard came in?

Betsie excitedly told Corrie, "I found out for sure, Corrie. I overheard two guards. The guards will not step foot in the bunkroom because of the FLEAS! Thank God for the fleas!" she exclaimed. The women added that to their prayers daily.

Without this constant supervision, Corrie and her sister were freely open to share the gospel with many of their roommates who had never heard it before. After seeing the Spirit move among the women, Corrie and her sister realized that the lice outbreak was part of God's plan to reach these women and they joyfully thanked Him for the lice, despite its discomfort.

Thanksgiving is a holiday that Christians should celebrate every single day of our lives

But I am convinced that it is a grace many of us do not exercise

The sweetest disposition of the soul is one of thankfulness

I love to be around genuinely thankful people!!!

To that end, I decided to preach this sermon on the sweet grace of thankfulness

I will begin with the account of the one leper who remembered to come back and give Christ thanks

I will speak of the evils of thanklessness from which we were saved

I will address the commands of God that we should be thankful all the days of our lives

I will give a foretaste of heavenly worship in which we will be continually giving thanks to God

I will list briefly the major areas of thankfulness that should saturate our lives

Finally, I will urge you to make a practical daily commitment to thankfulness

## I. Compelled to Thankfulness

***He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him*** Luke 17:16

### A. Foundation for Thankfulness: Total Desperation

1. leprosy a tragic disease
2. attacks the nerves, reduces sensitivity, produces degeneration of the cells
3. leprosy can be progressive, causing permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes
4. skin lesions are the primary external symptoms
5. probably the most dreaded disease of the ancient world... lepers were outcasts, unable to join in society
6. in Israel, they were considered permanently unclean, excluded from the people of God... cut off from their family, friends, neighbors... they were isolated among groups of other lepers
7. there was no cure in those days... it was a totally desperate situation
8. that is the foundation for overwhelming thankfulness... the emotions should rise in proportion to the black despair that the lepers had faced for years

### B. A Picture of Ourselves in Sin

1. lepers give us a graphic physical picture of ourselves in our sinful state before God
2. we were outcasts, excluded, unclean, grotesque
3. problem is: we don't really believe that... we see ourselves with the eyes of flesh and we look pretty good

4. this cuts off the flowering plant of thankfulness at the root... we don't realize how much grace has shown us in Christ

### C. Jesus' Healing Power

1. in this account: Jesus traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee
2. this group of lepers mingled: some Jews, at least one Samaritan
3. ten lepers stood at a distance as they were required to do... a physical reason, to protect the uninfected community from their disease; also a spiritual picture of our alienation from God

***Ephesians 2:12-13 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.***

4. they cry aloud to Jesus: begging for mercy

***Luke 17:13 "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"***

- a. pity is the most common emotional state of our Lord
- b. He sees us in our sin, our misery... he sees the plight of our lives: we are covered in the filth of rebellion, caught by the cords of sinful habits, sinking under the weight of the future wrath of God, without hope and without God in the world
- c. He is moved emotionally by the sight... he DOES take pity on them
5. Jesus' command: Go show yourselves to the priests...
  - a. Commanded by the Law of Moses in the Book of Leviticus
  - b. If one has been cleansed of leprosy, it is the priest's duty to put his official seal on the cleansing and allow the former leper to return to society
  - c. The command itself is a test... the healing hadn't occurred yet when Christ gave the command... but they obeyed by faith and began the journey to the priest
6. Amazing power of Christ!!
  - a. As they walk along suddenly ...

***Luke 17:15-16 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. <sup>16</sup> He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him-- and he was a Samaritan.***

- b. The reaction is powerful and immediate
  - c. It is saturated with joy and freedom... but it is very personal as well
  - d. The healing we have received was given by SOMEONE... by Jesus Christ
  - e. It has not come from a medicine bottle we stumbled upon as we walked along the sidewalk
  - f. It has not come from a vending machine, nor did we read about it on the Internet
  - g. NO... our cleansing, our healing came when a person named Jesus Christ gave us that gift
  - h. This Samaritan recognized that... and did the only sane and reasonable thing—he came back, threw himself on the ground and thanked Jesus
7. STOP: our reason for thanksgiving is greater than was this Samaritan's... we have been cleansed from a far greater disease, delivered from a far more horrible death... and the cost of that salvation has been told us again and again

This leper merely had his flesh restored to normal; he could now live a normal life

We have had our souls purified of sin, our record before the Judgment Seat of God is cleansed of sin; we were threatened with eternity in hell separate from God and from all light and joy, not merely the physical misery of living in a leper colony separate from other humans

There seemed to have been no cost to Jesus for this healing... he merely gave the command to go to the priests... the spiritually perceptive among them knew it was Jesus' power that had accomplished this healing; but Jesus gave nothing more than that

We know how much our salvation from sin cost Jesus... He poured out His lifeblood unto death for us... in great agony... the cost was absolutely immeasurable

Our grounds for thankfulness are immeasurably greater than those of this leper

## II. Convicted of Thanklessness

### A. The Problem of Thanklessness

1. the parable ends on a distressing note: the problem of thanklessness

***Luke 17:17-18 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"<sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"***

2. why did it not occur to the other nine to come back and give thanks to Jesus for what He'd done?

3. why the thanklessness? Could it be the same root cause as always: self-centeredness... "I am happy, I am healed, I am free, I am, I am, I am..." forgetting who gave it to you
4. Perhaps at a deeper level, we do not thank God because we think we deserve the blessings He's lavished on us
  - a. By this way of thinking, any adverse problem, anything that causes us trouble is the aberration
  - b. We expect the good, we are shocked by the trouble
  - c. The good things we get, we feel that we've earned them, or deserved them in some way
  - d. Also, we forget how totally dependent we are for life, breath and everything else
5. this is a GREAT problem... not a small one, as I will show you

#### B. The Great Sin of Thanklessness

1. Romans 1-3 depicts the overwhelming need every single human being has for salvation
2. Amazingly, it begins with the problem of THANKLESSNESS toward our magnificent Creator

***Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.***

3. Thus thanklessness is at the root of our sinful state before God
  - a. We do not love God, do not think about God, do not cherish God
  - b. Apart from Christ, people live lives ignorant of all His many blessings, and hardly ever think of Him at all
  - c. We still have the same habits of thanklessness
4. So Jesus stands over this thankful Samaritan wondering where the other nine were...

***Luke 17:17-18 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"<sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"***

#### C. Thanklessness Exposed

1. what is thanklessness? Let's start with a grumbling, complaining heart
2. whenever you complain you are exposing a root thanklessness in your heart
3. whenever you speak words of murmuring against God, you are displaying the lack of thanklessness
4. So also, whenever you covet the blessings given to another person... when you see their happiness, their successes, their honors, their possessions, and you are jealous of them... you are betraying the root thanklessness in your heart
5. we also ingratitude in our pride... whenever we boast about our achievements, we forget this simple concept:

***1 Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?***

The remedy to this boasting is true gratitude to God... "Everything I have comes from you, O Lord... if I am different at all, it's only because of God's gift to me"

6. We display ingratitude in simple forgetfulness
  - a. You wake in the morning and begin your day without a prayer time... you sail off into your day forgetting that "This is the day the Lord has made"... God willed that you should be alive one more day
  - b. You arrive safely in the car, and forget to thank God for His traveling mercies
  - c. You pass another birthday, and forget to give God the thanks He deserves for letting you live so long
  - d. You deposit a paycheck, and forget to thank God that He gave it to you to meet your needs and give you a chance to bless others
  - e. We weave self-centered thanklessness throughout the day
7. even excessive grief in trials can expose this heart evil
  - a. yes we should grieve when a love one is taken from us... but grieving too much or too long means we have not truly dealt with the fact that God was very generous to us already to have given us the relationship for as long as we had it

George Mueller's Funeral Sermon for his precious, beloved wife... partner in ministry, trusted confidant, mother of their children...

The sermon text was Psalm 119:68 "You are good, and do good..."

Its three divisions were:

"The Lord was good and did good:

first, in giving her to me;

second in so long leaving her to me; and

third, in taking her from me."

Chose to give thanks to the Lord by faith, and see His goodness even in the death of His wife

He was deeply thankful to God, not reproaching Him for taking his beloved wife

How often we fail to see things properly, and forget or choose not to thank God

#### D. All of Us Must Repent

1. Don't point the finger at those nine forgetful, happily cleansed former lepers
2. find yourself there as I find myself there... running happily on the way to begin the first day of the rest of my life
3. they must have been chattering happily amongst themselves about all the joys that would now be restored to them: the joy of human touch—of handshakes and hugs, of food and fellowship, of looks of amazement from their wives and parents and brothers and sisters and neighbors
4. so filled with joy, they didn't notice that one of them was missing... wasn't even there!
5. BUT Jesus NOTICED who came back to say thanks and who didn't

NOTE: Nine out of ten lepers failed to come back and give thanks... I wonder if I thank God 9/10ths as much as I should

### III. Commanded to Thankfulness

#### A. We Are Commanded to Be Thankful... and to Give Thanks

1. Thankfulness is a state of the heart that results in a THOUGHT-LIFE
  - a. You are moved beyond all description at how much grace God has lavished on someone so totally unworthy... someone spiritually so disgusting

- b. You think thoughts: “How deep the Father’s love for us... how vast beyond all measure, that he would give His only Son, to make a wretch His treasure.”
  - c. You are moved to tears... your heart is soft, yielded to God, unable to speak
2. then your mouth moves... the overflow of the heart comes from your mouth
  3. you say “Thank you, God... Thank you, thank you, thank you, for your indescribable gift”

#### B. Some of the Commands Listed

***Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus***

1 Thessalonians 5:18

***Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup> for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28-29***

***Psalm 107:1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.***

***Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.***

***Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.***

God has commanded us to be thankful in any and every situation... no matter what is going

#### IV. The Consummation of Thankfulness

##### A. The Present Heavens are Ringing with Thanks

***Revelation 4:8-10 Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." <sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever.***

##### B. The New Heavens and Earth will as well

1. John has a vision of a multitude greater than any could count from every tribe and language and people and nation
2. they are standing around the throne of Christ in white robes, and they are praising Him for their salvation
3. they are joined by angels... altogether they give endless thanks to Christ

***Revelation 7:11-12 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"***

4. aa

#### C. They Thank God for His Sovereign Rule

***Revelation 11:16-17 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup> saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign."***

Heaven is an absolutely God-centered place... all the angels, living creatures, and saints delight to give thanks to God

They realize with clear vision how great is God in His person, how much God has done for each of them, how great are His acts in history... and they cannot stop thanking Him

That's where we're headed... a place of eternal thanksgiving!

## V. The Content of Thankfulness

So what should I thank God for?

***Ephesians 5:20 Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ***

When should I thank God?

***Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus***

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Everything... always... even for fleas in a German concentration camp!!

So... it's time to thank God... you're having your prayer time, but your mind is empty

A. Perhaps You Come Up Empty... Though You Shouldn't

***Psalm 103:2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits***

B. The Thanksgiving Sheet... Arranged by Categories

1. God Himself

a. God's nature

- Thank you for your holiness: you are perfectly separated from all evil, and high above all your creation.
- Thank you, God, that you never change.
- Thank you that you love righteousness and hate wickedness.
- Thank you that you have the power to accomplish all your holy will, and that no power can stop you.

#### b. God's eternal plan

- Thank you, Father, that before the foundation of the world, you had planned our salvation in Christ.
- Thank you, Lord, that nothing surprises you, and that you work all things after the counsel of your will.

#### c. God's great acts in history

- Thank you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that by the word of your power all things were created, and have been sustained moment by moment.
- Thank you for calling Abraham, and for promising that through him all nations on earth would be blessed.
- Thank you for delivering Israel from the power of Pharaoh at the Red Sea.

#### d. Jesus Christ

- Thank you for bringing Jesus Christ into the world, born of a virgin when the time had fully come.
- Thank you that Christ took on a human body and was fully tempted just as we are, yet was without sin.
- Thank you for the amazing display of your mercy through Christ's miracles of healing.
- Thank you for the perfect teachings of Christ, who spoke like no man had ever spoke.
- Thank you that Jesus Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree, shedding His blood that we might stand fully righteous in Him on Judgment Day.
- Thank you that Christ rose from the dead on the third day and is sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

#### e. The Holy Spirit

- Thank you for the regenerating work of the Spirit, who creates life where there was none.
- Thank you that the Holy Spirit lives within us forever.

## 2. God's Spiritual Blessings

### a. Already

- Thank you for your perfect word, the Bible, which teaches us everything we need for life and godliness.
- Thank you for the perfect salvation Jesus Christ has accomplished in His death on the cross.
- Thank you for the saving graces: the Word, the call of the Spirit, regeneration, faith, and repentance.

#### b. Not Yet

- Thank you for heaven, the perfection of fellowship with you, Lord, forever and ever!!
- Thank you for the resurrection, that though worms destroy this body, yet in our flesh we will see God.
- Thank you for perfect souls, no longer divided and tempted by sin.
- Thank you for the New Heaven and the New Earth.

### 3. God's Temporal Blessings

#### a. Provision

- Thank you for our bodies, that are so fearfully and wonderfully made.
- Thank you that you keep us in such good health, and heal us from so many diseases.
- Thank you for daily food, and of such delicious variety: breads, meats, vegetables, fruits, sweets, drinks.
- Thank you for the physical beauty of the earth, and how it satisfies our five senses.

#### b. Families

- Thank you for creating as your first institution the family.
- Thank you for marriage, the highest earthly love which people can experience with each other.
- Thank you for sustaining Christian marriages through love, mercy, and constant forgiveness.
- Thank you for children, marvelous, fascinating, challenging, and rewarding gifts from God.

#### c. Society

- Thank you for America, our home and native land.
- Thank you for the freedoms we enjoy here: freedom to worship, work, speak, think, prosper, live.

#### d. Desires of our Hearts

- Thank you for a myriad of pleasures which are not essential to our lives but which bring us joy: hobbies, possessions, books, sports, aromas, flavors, sounds.

### C. Come Up with your Own

## VI. Committed to Thankfulness

### A. This is a Commitment We Make

***Psalm 7:17 I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness***

***Psalm 35:18 I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you.***

***Psalm 56:12 I am under vows to you, O God; I will present my thank offerings to you.***

***Psalm 116:17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD.***

### B. Practicality

1. fill your heart with God's blessings by studying scripture
2. meditate deeply on
  - a. your natural status as a rebel who deserved God's wrath
  - b. the cost of Christ's sacrifice for you
  - c. the richness of the blessings God has promised you for the future
3. return those blessings back to God in thanksgiving
  - a. set aside time daily to give thanks to God: daily Quiet Times
    - i) use this thanksgiving sheet
    - ii) or make your own
    - iii) ransack your daily life for small blessings
    - iv) ransack your theology for deeper, more eternal blessings
    - v) and THANK GOD FOR EACH ONE
  - b. do so also with your family... in your family devotions, set aside time for thanksgiving
4. Retrain your speech life
  - a. When tempted to complain... thank God instead
  - b. When tempted to boast... thank God instead

- c. When tempted to covet... thank God instead
- d. When going through trials... thank God
- e. When going through successes... thank God
- f. When buying a new possession... thank God
- g. When taking your car in for repair... thank God