

Count Your Blessings

Luke 17:11-19

Preface

Illus: A soldier in the American Army was sent to a rest camp after a period of active service. When he returned to his outfit, he wrote a letter to General George Patton and thanked him for the splendid care he had received. General Patton wrote back to him and said that for 35 years he had sought to give all the comfort and convenience that he could to his men, and added that this was the first letter of thanks he had received in all of his years in the army.

Illus: One frustrated businessman wrote, "I have 175 employees, men and women. At Thanksgiving I sent them 175 choice turkeys. Only four thanked me. Two thanked me by sending notes and two said thanks when they happened to meet me in the hallway, Because of their thanklessness, I have am inclined to never to out of my way to be nice again.

Someone has said, *"If you want to find gratitude, look for it in the dictionary."*

Many people fail to understand the significance of what God has done for them. Our text today provides an example and important instructions about recognizing our blessings.

Scripture

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"

¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." Luke 17:11-19 NIV

Introduction

I am going to confess something at the outset. I don't enjoy being around negative people. Some people seem to always be upbeat and positive while others seem to be determined to be negative and pessimistic about life.

We've all heard the question "Is your glass half full or half empty?" For some people not only is their glass half empty, it is dirty, the wrong size, wrong color and not the one they wanted.

The Bible is full of examples of people who in the face of various trials remained positive and optimistic because of their faith in God. The Bible teaches us that God is in control and He is working all things to good for those who love Him.

Yet many Christians manage to see doom and gloom no matter how bright the sun is shining. I am convinced this is the result of failure to count your blessings. This is the result of not having a thankful heart that takes time to recognize blessings.

In our text, 10 people with leprosy were healed by Jesus but only one returned to thank Him and praise God. This means that 9 people who were also healed didn't care enough to thank God. Which do you suppose God would bless further?.

Nine people received the blessing of being healed by the Son of God and yet they were so caught up in themselves that they didn't bother to show any gratitude.

Lack of gratitude is always the result of self-centeredness.

Illus: I recall the year before last, our church gave out Wal Mart gift cards to several families who were struggling that year. The intent was to help them purchase something for Christmas for their children. Most of the families were people who live in this community but rarely if ever attend our church.

In each case a staff member of our church visited them in their home where we prayed with them and encouraged them to come to church and worship God with us. In the year that followed, almost all of the families never came to church even once.

These couples mirror the attitude of those with leprosy in our text. In response to the spirit of God, Christians reached out to these families and yet they are so blinded by their own self-centeredness that they can't see the hand of God.

We must learn the importance of recognizing our blessings.

1. Understand that God is Eager to Bless You

Illus: Have you ever been in the store and watched a child throw a tantrum over something on display at the checkout? Small children will scream and cry for something that they just decided they wanted. By the time they head out the door of the store, the child has usually forgotten about the item and has their mind on something completely different.

The parent was wise to not waste money on the item but rather to store up their money for the things the child really needs. The same is true of God.

God is eager to bless us and reward us but with the things He knows we need rather than the things we want at the moment. We must understand that God is always interested in our spiritual well being. While He is eager to bless us in other ways, God is mostly interested in drawing us close to Him.

Usually what hinders our material blessings is our spiritual condition. I have seen people come to this church and walk the aisle during the invitation and rededicate their life to the Lord only to not show back up in church for weeks. No one is fooled by such actions; especially God.

⁷“*But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.*” *Jeremiah 17:7-8 NIV*

Just as Jesus was eager to heal the ten of leprosy, God is eager to bless you and meet your needs. He is eager to bring peace in your life. The problem is usually that God knows what we need in order to experience peace isn't what we think will bring peace.

2 Chronicles 16:9 says, “*For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*” NKJV

God is eager to bless you and be a part of your life but He requires your loyalty. Many people have about as much loyalty as a cat who finds food at the neighbor's home.

Jesus said, “*...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*” *John 10:10 KJV*

Open your life to the blessing of God by giving your life to Him. Hold nothing back and say, “Here I am Lord use me.”

2. Understand that God is Eager to Hear Your Praise

I hope by now it has really registered with you just how pathetic it was that only 1 out of 10 of those healed returned to give thanks. We must all ask ourselves if we would have been that one who returned to praise God or if we would be among the nine.

¹Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ²Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” Psalm 103:1-2 NIV

Certainly we cannot remember everything God has done for us. But for goodness sake, don't forget them all either. What about your savior, your freedom, your health, your family, your parents, your children & grandchildren, your church, your friends, your home, your job, your hands and feet? If we will just look around, we will see that blessings abound.

¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...”. Deuteronomy 8:18 NIV

Fail to count your blessings and you will soon see none. Make it a point to count your blessings and you will begin to see them be multiplied over and over by the Lord.

Some people look for God's blessings in their life while others stumble over them and never recognize them. They just keep walking and whining.

Illus: Wallace Johnson, was a very successful man who built numerous Holiday Inn hotels and convalescent homes. He said, “When I was 40 years old I worked in a sawmill. One morning the boss told me, you're fired.” Depressed and discouraged, I felt like the world had caved in on me. It was during the Depression, and my wife and I greatly needed the wages I had been earning. When I went home I told my wife what had happened. She asked, what are you going to do now? I replied, I am going to mortgage our little home and go into the building business. My first venture was the construction of two small buildings. Within five years, I was a multimillionaire. Today if I could locate the man who fired me, I would sincerely thank him for what he did. At the time it happened, I did not understand why I was fired. Later, I saw it was God's unerring and wondrous plan to get me out and into the way of His choosing.”

When Jesus healed the ten, did He look for gratitude? Yes. Did He look for thankfulness? Yes. And He looks for an attitude of thanksgiving from you and me today.

Conclusion

Illus: It was about 12 years ago now when it happened. I was doing some contract computer programming for a petroleum company in Petal Mississippi where we lived. I was at lunch with some of the employees from DPI when Brenda Howell called me. In a soft but concerned tone that I still remember to this day, she said "You need to call Doctor Weaver's office they need to talk to you." I could not imagine what they wanted.

Pam and I had been in his office the day before for physicals as we were planning to adopt a little girl from Honduras. It never crossed my mind that the call was about the physicals. Doctor Weaver was a great small town doctor who didn't beat around the bush about things. The nurse asked if I could come in right then and speak with the doctor and I went right over.

Doctor Weaver informed me that there was a problem with Pam's chest X-ray. He said the upper lobe of her right lung was collapsed. I immediately went and got Pam from school and we went back to the doctor to get more details. He called it a carcinoid tumor in her lung and it had grown into her bronchial tube. From there we went to the hospital for a Cat-Scan and then on to surgeon for a consultation.

I have always been very grateful for the amount of time each doctor spent with us and the way they carefully broke the news.

It was about 6:00 PM that day when we first heard the words "lung cancer". We held our composure as we left the doctor's office.

When we got in the lobby, we hugged and both of us began to sob. The only person in the lobby was a man cleaning the floor. As it happened, he was a member of our church and he came over to comfort us. That day, God used a humble man cleaning the floor to comfort Pam and me and I have always been grateful for that.

Suddenly, our entire world stopped. Everything that was so urgent and important became of no importance at all. In one overwhelming afternoon, life as we knew it was turned completely upside down.

Within a couple of weeks, we were in Houston Texas at MD Anderson Hospital. We met with Dr. Steven Swisher who is a Thoracic Surgeon and is now the Chairman of the department. He took a lot of time to explain to us our options and what could be done. The staff recognized that we were scared to death and went

to great lengths to assure us and comfort us. I will never forget that and will forever be grateful.

Pam underwent a complicated 8-hour surgery. They were to remove the tumor, part of her lung and repair the bronchial tube.

I recall sitting in the waiting room and looking across the room at my two small children and thinking to myself, "What will we do if she doesn't make it? What will I do without her?"

About to burst into tears in front of my children and family members, I left the room and went to the hospital chapel. There I fell on my knees at the altar and prayed for God's healing, mercy and forgiveness. At that altar, God didn't promise me anything except that He was in control.

Thanks to God's healing and thanks to the expertise of the medical professionals, the surgery was completely successful. They removed the tumor and upper lobe, pushed the middle and lower lobes of her lung up in the chest cavity and spliced the bronchial tube back together.

Following the surgery, a special pain doctor spoke with me and explained her pain and the objective of pain management. His name was Dr. Allen Burton. He explained that he did not want her to be out cold but comfortable enough to not be in pain. He said to have the nurse call him anytime if there was any problem or question. Later that evening, I could not wake Pam and I got really scared. I had him paged and he came in about 11:30 PM in a tuxedo. He had been at a banquet of some sort. He checked her medicine and made some adjustments and we talked a few minutes. I was so grateful he came in even if it mainly just eased my fears. When he was about to leave, I apologized for calling him in. He looked at me and said, "Don't apologize. It has been a blessing to me to see how much you love one another."

As horrifying as the entire experience was, God used it to change our family forever. Our entire family learned what was really important in life. We learned to separate minor inconveniences from real life threatening problems. We learned that our love for one another was more important than anything the world offers.

Most importantly, we learned that God was in control. We learned to trust everything to God.

And I learned to count my blessings.

Are you counting your blessings?

