

Healing of the Ten Lepers

A Lesson on Conversion

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Bible Text: Luke 17:11-19

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Take your copy of the Scriptures and let's go to Luke 17 as we continue going through the Gospel of Luke. Luke 17.

I saw them all over Brazil as I ministered there and traveled there. A few years later, I saw them all over India, at least the portion of India that I traveled to, about every corner. But I never remember seeing one in America. Now, I know there are some out there and nearby even, but I never remember seeing one in America until last night about 7:45, I stopped at a food mart not to be misunderstood as one owned by Phil Baggett. I stopped at a food mart in Decatur, Alabama and there it was in a quite prominent place. Kind of toward the back of the store on the floor but in the center toward the back where just about anyone who came in would see it. It was a little shrine. There were 2 little statues in this little shrine and they were quite fat and there was a pile of quarters, it looked like, in the little statue's arms. And out in front of the 2 little statues, there was a part of the little shrine display and there was a glass of chocolate milk with a straw. There was a bowl of incense. Yeah, that's it. I took the picture. Do you see the 2 fat guys sitting there back at the back? Then I assume that's a grapefruit and those are apples and those are actually Cuties, little oranges out front there, they call them Cuties.

I looked at it and I backed up and I thought I'd seen that all over the pagan world but I had not seen one in America that I remember seeing until I saw that one. So I took a picture and there was only one lady in there, it was a lady that worked there and I asked her, I said, "What is this?" She said, "That's Buddha or a Buddha." I said, "It is but there is chocolate milk here." She said, "Well, that's for him." They give him milk. Evidently he lives on a diet of chocolate milk and fruit, best I can tell. But I said, "Is that right?" She said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, I don't have to feed mine." She said, "Do you have a Buddha?" I said, "No ma'am, my God sits on the throne of heaven. He needs nothing." I said, "He wouldn't be much of a God if I had to take care of him." She said, "Oh, okay."

But I got to thinking about that as I got back in the car and I began to drive off and I thought: you know, it really doesn't matter whether it's the many shrines I saw in Brazil and in Brazil they were Roman Catholic shrines. People would build a little shrine, usually it was a statue of Mary and they would bring offerings and burn incense and do various things. Or in India and the most popular idol in India is in an elephant headed

god. It's a hideous looking thing and they'll have this little elephant head statue and they'll do pretty much what you saw there. They'll bring food and money to sacrifice to it and burn incense to it. So whether or not it's a Roman Catholic shrine in Brazil or an elephant headed god/idol/shrine in India or a Buddhist shrine in Decatur, Alabama, they're all basically the same thing. What you do is you take these little idols that you worship and you sacrifice to them, you feed them, you burn incense to them and in return they are supposed to bless you. In return they'll help your family. In return, they're supposed to give you a better marriage. Help your kids do better. Help your finances. Give you better health. And in the case of the food mart owned by this Indian man, I assume, in India or at least managed by him, he had the shrine there so the business might be blessed.

But this kind of superstition fills the world where you have a god of some kind and you go through the motions, you jump through the hoops, you perform the ritual and then you are to get some blessing back so that your life can be better so that you can have your best life now. Have you ever asked yourself the question, "Why is it, now literally, hundreds and hundreds of millions of people across this world practice this kind of superstition?" May have different names, different idols. They might not even have an idol but they're basically superstitious. They'll find a few motions, rituals, mantras, whatever they go through and then they are to get blessings back in return. I'll tell you why that's so popular because that is so natural to the fallen heart. That is so reasonable to fallen man's thinking. I do some stuff, appease the deity and I get something back in return. At the end of the day, it's totally and radically self-centered. It's all about me doing better. Me being blessed. Me having a better life. So I'll just show some honor or homage to this whatever it is I'm worshipping and I get something back in return.

Well, we know that's false religion and as we go through the Gospel of Luke, over and over and over the Lord Jesus keeps pointing out the true in contrast with the false and he's very pointed about it. If you're a whiny weakling, you wouldn't like the ministry of Jesus. In a very manly, courageous way he publicly confronted the error of his day, the mighty, powerful, religious elite of the day, the Jewish Pharisees and he publicly embarrassed and rebuked them over and over again because he was constantly striving to point out the false that men might find the truth. Over and over we see that.

Now, in this text, he's not going to use the Pharisees to point out the contrast between the false which most people believed in and the truth which few at this point in his ministry believed in. But this time he's going to use something different. Let's look at the lesson today from Luke 17:11-19.

11 While He [that's Jesus, of course] was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; 13 and they raised their voices, 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 were going, they were cleansed. 15 Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, 16 and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

17 Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine - where are they? 18 Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well." 20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed."

First of all, let's note here in this text his true mission which is Jerusalem and the cross. I. His true mission, Jerusalem and the cross. You'd miss this with just a casual reading but look at verse 11 again. It says, "While He was on the way to Jerusalem." On the way to Jerusalem. Now, this isn't a straight trajectory to Jerusalem. He's not just on a crow's flight path to Jerusalem. It just means that it's very close to the time when he's going to Jerusalem because that has been his destination from the beginning. From the moment Jesus Christ was a one-celled human being in the womb of his virgin mother, Jerusalem was his destination. From the moment he gave his first infant cry, Jerusalem was his destination. When he began his earthly ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles, Jerusalem was his destination. As he traveled, trained his disciples, performed miracles too numerous to number, yet Jerusalem was his destination. He said in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me," therefore Jerusalem was his destination. He prayed the night before his arrest and the coming crucifixion, "Father, not My will but Thy will be done," because Jerusalem was his destination. He was the Lamb of God, the Bible says, and further the Scriptures say he is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He's the final sacrifice for sin, therefore Jerusalem was his destination. You see, Jesus is the one true qualified offering for the sin of God's elect and Jerusalem was the place of atonement and the place of sacrifice so Jerusalem was his destination.

But not just Jerusalem but an altar outside the camp. A place beyond the wall of the city of Jerusalem. An altar not built by human hands. An altar built by God himself. A little hill, Golgotha, the place of the skull. That is his destination for that is the place where he will die and give his life a ransom for all. There the Father will be glorified and the children will be redeemed. Jerusalem is his destination.

I call this his true mission, not in the sense that everything else was false but everything else our Lord did before he goes to Jerusalem and before he dies on the cross were leading up to, they were preliminary, they were foreshadowings of the one true mission God the Father sent him to perform. That's why Isaiah prophesying of him said that he set his face like flint. It means he had a predetermined, unthwartable, decisive conviction. "I'm going to Jerusalem. My Father sent me to go there and there I will make atonement for our children."

So he's nearing his destination but first, there is time to show some more mercy and that's what he does. II. His tender mercy. His tender mercy healing these lepers. Now, verse 11 says he is passing between Samaria and Galilee. Now, we all understand that Samaria was the land of half-breeds: half Jew, half Gentile. So the Jews hated the Samaritans more than they hated the Gentiles and that was a lot of hate. If a Jewish man was going to

the annual feast in Jerusalem, he would go way around out of his way not to have to put his feet on Samaritan soil. That's how unclean and how much of an outcast Samaritans were in the minds of a Jew. But Jesus, on the other hand, passes right through Samaria more than once. You see, Jesus' mercy reaches those that the world discards. Listen friend, you listen to your pastor this morning: I don't care who he is or what he is or who she is or what she is, as long as there's breathing, there's hope in Jesus Christ. Do you know why? Because they don't save themselves. If God does the saving, there's always hope. Amen? If God does the saving, no one is outside of hope as long as they are still breathing. I don't care if they can't even consciously communicate, share the glories of Christ with them. God may yet save them. Amen?

Jesus doesn't just reach these Samaritans, these outcast, he goes to them. He's on the last leg of his journey of mercy and he remembers these outcasts. The Bible says in verse 12 that as he entered the area he met these lepers. Now, they had to be meeting him outside the city because lepers were not allowed to go into the city. If you were a leper in this day, you were considered unclean, physically and spiritually. You were an outcast. You could not go and fellowship in society at all. So they are forbidden from entering the city, Leviticus 13:46 was the law that required that. Lepers, you see, were a picture of those diseased by sin and shut out from the city of God. Lepers are the most vivid symbol of sinful corruption. Leprosy was an outward symbol of sin in its deepest malignity. Now, I'm not saying that these were worse sinners than anybody else. Now, the Jews held that. They held that if you were leprous you had some particular sin you were being punished for. I'm just saying that in the biblical use of the leper's condition, it is to point out the great, wretched corruption of man. We are sinful lepers before a holy God.

So he stood at a distance, verse 12 says, and that was by the will of the 10 lepers. They knew that they were required by Levitical law, they could not come but so close so they're at a distance. Again, how vividly this narrative speaks to the spiritual condition of men's souls. We are all alike sinful lepers and we are shut out from God as unworthy to draw near. Isaiah 64:6 reminds us of this condition we all have before God, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean." You can understand that when you understand how a leper was considered unclean and not allowed in society. All of us. All of us, not just the 10 lepers outside of Samaria. All of us are like one who is unclean, "And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." I'm not being crude. That was the same word you would use for the menstrual cloth or a cloth that was saturated with the oozing pus of an infected sore. God said, "Pile up all of the things that you think would merit my approval: every good work, every good deed, every sacrifice, everything you do to think you can somehow please me. Pile it all up," and God said, "it's like a rag soaked with the pus of an infected sore. It's offensive to me at every level. You're a sinful leper," God says. "An outcast. Unclean. Unworthy to be in my presence."

In verse 13, the Bible says that they raised their voices saying, "Jesus, have mercy!" Jesus, as you see, comes to them. He has come to their place. He has come to their misery and they cry for mercy. Isn't that also true, friend, that we are so sick in sin, so blinded, so depraved in our natural souls that had Christ not come to us, we would have never sought him? Is it not true that he not in mercy had come to help us, we would never in mercy

have cried for the help? These lepers would have never found Christ if Christ didn't go to them. Oh, what a picture of our condition.

Jesus passes near and they cry for mercy. You see, we're all sick with a sinful double leprosy: 1. We don't comprehend the great, weighty depth of our dire, sinful offensiveness to this Triune, infinitely holy and just God. We don't cry for him. We don't get it. We don't get it. Secondly, we love the sin that we find in our hearts and lives. We don't see our need and we love the sin that condemns us. If he does not come and arrest us in our terrible condition, we are lost forever. We are lepers. Sinful lepers.

But Jesus Christ, the Bible says, he is the one true prophet sent from God. That means he can give us the understanding we need. Jesus Christ is the one true high priest of God which means he's the one who can cleanse and reunite fallen, sinful men with a true and holy God. Well, these lepers in this historical narrative, they realize their desperate physical condition and they realize that this Christ is one who has divine healing power and they look to him for help. What a beautiful marriage: divine mercy and human misery are meant for each other and they find each other here.

Now, verse 14 says that as they cry for mercy, Jesus responds back and says, "Go and show yourself to the priests." Interesting. Go and show yourself to the priests. Now, of course, they do that. They immediately do what he says but they are not immediately healed. They are not healed yet so they show some faith. There's a faith there that they're just going to do what he says. They are heading to the priests. Jesus here prescribes no medicines, no washings. We see that in other places of Scripture when a healing occurs but this time, he just says, "Go." They were to go and act as if healed.

Now, Jesus said unto the priests because Levitical law required before a leprous person could be received back into society, they had to submit themselves to the priest. He would examine their sores and make sure they were indeed healed and then they were permitted back in. I think the Lord is also wrestling at this time with people who have a false understanding of who he is and his mission and he doesn't want to be deterred from the Father's mission to go to the cross and so he wants to not stir up the animosities of the people who were against him nor those who want to enthrone him right away as king. Either one of those groups, his enemies or his disciples, can get out of balance so I think one of the things he's doing, he wants to establish incontrovertibly that a true miracle has occurred but secondly, this will keep his enemies from saying that he violated the law. The law requires a healed leper to go to the priests.

Now, we learn later that one of these lepers who was healed returned to express gratitude and from the indications of the text, he was the only one who was a non-Jew. He was a Samaritan. The only one who came back with gratitude was a Samaritan. I think it's very interesting, isn't it, that he had to pass by Samaritanism and Judaism on his way to Jesus and that is true of everyone who comes to Jesus Christ. Listen to me: you deny, throw away, put aside every other thing and cling absolutely and only to Christ. You do not bring your father's religion, your grandfather's religion, your heritage, your background,

your teaching, your training. You come unreservedly, broken, bankrupt, empty, clinging only to Christ.

So he cast aside all that he had been taught in his Samaritan religion about going to Mount Gerizim and worshipping God. He threw everything away the Jews might have taught him about going to Jerusalem and that's where you find and worship God. He cast all of that aside and he goes only to Christ. What a picture of true salvation.

Now, verse 14 tells us they were all cleansed. All 10 of them but only one returns and that brings us to III. A true conversion and that's the one leper that returns with gratitude. He is the picture; he is the illustration of genuine conversion.

Look at verse 15, "Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice." I think it's very interesting. We don't know the exact timeline here but it's as if they are all just walking along. They all noticed they are healed. The other guys just think, "Hotdog, life is better," and one of them says, "No, I've got to go to the Lord and Savior who did this." There's a real difference there. A real difference than just getting a blessing from this deity and going back to honor and worship the deity who gave you the blessing. That's why I hold him out as a picture of true conversion. In the fullness of his heart, this non-Jew, this poor Gentile Samaritan returns to Jesus, honoring Jesus, thanking Jesus.

Verse 15 says he comes back "with a loud voice." He had been very loud in his prayer for mercy, now he's very loud in his gratitude, joy and thanksgiving to Christ. Sometimes I think we're a little too formal. We're a little too dignified. If you've received this kind of gracious mercy, sometimes it ought to bubble over in your emotions, at least equal to hollering for your silly football team.

John 5:23, "So that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." "Pastor, how do we know if these folks we run into, we know a lot of them aren't taught, how do we know if they really know God? They really love Jesus? They really honor Jesus?" Now look, the Jesus of Scripture, the real Jesus as he is revealed. You see, a lot of you, even some of you sitting under my voice, have you a little subjective effeminate Jesus you've made up in your mind because you're comfortable with him but I'm going to tell you, the Jesus of this book blows your mind about every time you look at it. He humbles you. He reproves you. He exalts himself as distinct and transcendent of everything we are and what do we do when he does that? We fall on our faces like this Samaritan and say, "Hallelujah! You're who you say you are. I'm wrong. You're right." Amen? If you want to know if somebody really knows and loves God, find out what they think of the true Jesus of Scripture. Now, that's a little complicated because if they haven't been taught right they may not know the right Jesus. That's why for the 1,159th time I'll tell you: make sure your family is under the preaching of the word of God. It's God's means to give us a sound understanding and sound doctrine of who Christ is and what the Gospel is. I'm sorry. That's his means. Bible studies are good. Fellowship groups are good. Reading a good Christian book together is good. It cannot replace the central means God has ordained and that's the faithful

preaching of the word in the power of the Spirit. Sacrifice everything else but don't let that go. Don't let that go.

Verse 16. This Gentile outcast, leprous Samaritan, "he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him." He was a stranger. The word "stranger" there could be translated "foreigner." It literally means at heathen, a pagan. This one, now listen, this one that the religious culture of the day which had the Bible, the Old Testament, the religious culture of the day would have drawn a hard line in the sand and said, "A Samaritan Gentile cannot be one of God's children," and Jesus is basically saying, "He's the only one in the group. He's the only one who is a real child of God. He's showing you the contrast because he is truly converted." He is giving thanks to Jesus and this leprous outcast is welcomed at the feet of Jesus and he honors his Lord with praise and with gratitude. I think it's interesting to note that he's at the feet of Jesus but one thing is missing: his leprosy. My friend, the moment a genuine believer from their heart cries out in faith in Jesus Christ, the leprosy of sin is gone between them and God. It's gone. I mean, the moment the first seed of gratitude for Christ's love and mercy toward a sinner, the moment that first seed of gratitude springs up in your heart, the sin of leprosy has already been removed. He's that quick and that thorough in his cleansing and saving power.

Well, this fellow, he was as far an outcast as you can be. He was a Gentile but worse than that, in the Jewish mind of the day, the religious authorities' doctrine of the day, he was a half-breed Jew Gentile which made him even worse. On top of that, he has leprosy which is the greatest form of uncleanness in the culture of the day. But Jesus has mercy for those whom the world has thrown away. Our Lord welcomes him, the one who was a stranger from birth to the covenant of promise while the 9 unthankful ones were of the lineage of Abraham. You see, you don't get this, in this Jewish culture, this was radical. This was radical for the promised Messiah to be receiving a Samaritan, a leprous Samaritan. Do you know what Jesus is doing? My next Roman numeral, he's clarifying. A true clarification is taking place here. He is exposing the true and the false and like we've been saying, like I said from the beginning, he does it over and over and over. He wants us to see the difference.

So notice what Jesus does as he further clarifies what's going on and the point he wants them to get. Verse 17, "Then Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine - where are they?'" Now, first of all, of course, Jesus knew all 10 were healed. He's asking a rhetorical question. He knows the answer but he's trying to make a point. He's teaching a lesson here. By the way, I think it's good to keep in our hearts and minds, now listen: the one who numbers the stars numbers your mercies. He knows how many mercies and blessings he has flooded your life with and he expects gratitude. He expects gratitude. That's what he's saying here. "Where are the 9? Why just this one comes back with gratitude?"

Continuing on in verse 17, "Then Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine - where are they?'" Now, I think that's an interesting phrase "where are they?" Here is the God of the universe, the God who made every one of these, the God who would die on a cross to redeem them from the curse of their sin and the just divine

wrath that should come upon them. This God stands and he says, "Where are they?" You see, his omniscience will prove them. He will prove the genuineness of every man's supposed faith. He will prove all men. Again, this is a rhetorical question. He knew exactly what was going on. He knew where they were. He's trying to make a point. "Where are they?" He's saying to the people, "Can you not see the difference between going through the motions of religion though that religion has some truth in it and a heart conversion that genuinely loves the Savior?" Christ is saying, "Don't you see the difference?" He wants you to see the true in contrast to the false.

Isaiah 40:27 says, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD'?" He knows it all. Here these 9 are publicly exposed as to their lack of true and saving faith and true love for Jesus Christ. Actually, God has done the same thing from the very beginning. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden. God comes to the garden and he knows where Adam is but he says, "Where are you? Adam, where are you?" It's more than just geographically, "I need to find you." God knew. God knew where he was. He's making a point. "Where did you go?" This will be asked of every living soul that's ever lived. One day God will look at every man and say, "Where have you been? Where have you been? What have you been doing? Who have you been loving? To whom have you been devoted? Who has had your heart? Where have you been?" And he will publicly prove the piety or ingratitude of every man. Great, great clarification. He's doing that here. That's why he is publicly saying this, "Where are those 9?" Well, he knew very well where they were. This would be like the psalmist, Psalm 103:2, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits." Let's not be like those who put our blessings under a bushel and set our wants on the hilltops.

Verse 18, he says, "Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" Now in the narrative, Luke was saying this was a Samaritan stranger, a foreigner and now Jesus says, "This is in your definition an outcast foreigner from the covenant of promise." This fellow here never made it to the priest in Jerusalem. He just basically decided that this guy who had just met that Jesus has something the priests in Jerusalem don't have. "I think I'll just bypass the priests and go right back to Jesus." That's a picture of bypassing the law because that's what the law required in putting your faith only in Christ. Listen, it's not your works plus Jesus, it's Jesus that saves you. He didn't have to do the work of going to the priest and Jesus doesn't rebuke him for it. Here Jesus, of course, is exposing the Jewish culture in general, especially their religious leaders as they were ungrateful religionists who didn't honor Jesus, who didn't bow down to him, who didn't worship him, who were not grateful to him, yet there were many outside of Israel who did find him like this dirty, Gentile, half-breed, outcast Samaritan. A stranger. A foreigner. One of the purely heathen stock finds grace and salvation while those, the Jews, who had the benefits of the law and the prophets, who are of the lineage of David and the lineage of Abraham, who had the covenant of promise, they missed it all. How close they were but yet how far they were. I believe there's a powerful illustration here for us.

Look at verse 19, "He said to him," to the man, "'Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.'" In other words, "You're finished. You know, there is nothing more to do than

to place faith in me." Now, I think it's interesting to note that all the other 9 were healed. Did you get that? The other 9 had a faith in Jesus to heal their body but this one Samaritan, I'm convinced, went beyond that. His faith was of a saving faith whereby he got his body healed and his soul healed also.

You see, friend, I've been teaching you this for years: there is a faith in Christ that is less than saving faith. Did you hear me? There is a type of faith even in Christ that's not saving faith and our churches are flooded with this kind of stuff. Hebrews 6:4-6 reminds us, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened." He didn't say it wasn't a genuine enlightenment. There is a genuine enlightenment of God that came into their souls. They "tasted of the heavenly gift," which, I think, speaks clearly that there's been some sort of spiritual enlightenment in their hearts. They "have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit." This is the work of God. They "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, if they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." Now, either we're going to have to change the theology of all of our forefathers and our own and believe we can all just get saved, lose, get saved and lose it, get saved and lose it or we conclude that there are people who are wrought upon by God but yet they fall short of saving faith like the 9 lepers who had some level of confidence and trust in Jesus but not enough to worship him and honor him.

You see, Jesus is just not your errand boy to fix your problems. He's the Lord you bow and worship and there's a big difference between the 2. A whole lot of what's called Gospel preaching today is just add Jesus on to your busy, busy life and get your "get out of hell free" pass and he'll start making your life better. That's not the Gospel. The Gospel is that we are wretches. We are sinful lepers before a holy God and we flee to Jesus to escape the wrath of God and we are filled with gratitude, love and honor and worship for him the rest of our lives.

James 2:14, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" Can that faith save him? That faith? From time immemorial, there have been scores of those who placed that faith, a type of faith in Christ but it is a non-saving faith. I believe this was the faith of Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot, like all the other 11 forsook all to follow Jesus. He believed in Jesus at some level but he was not converted. And I've told you many times, "Pastor, what exposes the reality?" T-I-M-E. In time, Judas showed his true colors. In time, they came out. Now, you wouldn't have thought that at the beginning. You would have made him treasurer because he seemed so faithful, committed, loyal and trustworthy which is exactly what they did. They made Judas the treasurer. But in time, in time. That's why it's good to have a pastor that's been with you for 35 years because just, well not all of them, but most of my warts are out. And a lot of yours are too and we've learned that we can forgive each other and stand with each other and realize we're all just worthless wretches and grace somehow keeps us.

But this type of faith in Jesus that's not a saving faith is a faith that minimizes sin. You won't hear much talk about sin and the depth of sin and the offensiveness of sin and the

depravity of sin, the leprous nature of sin. You don't hear much about brokenness and repentance and you don't hear about the corresponding gratitude. You just don't hear much about it. There is soft peddling of it but not a real teaching of the doctrine of man's sinfulness. And this faith, like the faith of Judas, this non-saving faith, it minimizes the cross. Oh, there's a splash of it here and there but there's not the soul, resolute dependence on, "He died literally taking the wrath in my place." There is a minimizing of the new birth. It's all about, "You did this or you did that." It's not about the fact that there must be a God-wrought work of regeneration, a new birthing in the spirit of the heart.

Today, Joel Osteen is the standard-bearer of this false faith but Joel is just the last in a long line. The generation before had Robert Schuller at the Crystal Cathedral. And you can keep going back decade after decade and you'll find these guys who pervert the truth of Scripture, throw in a whole lot of feel-good psychology and deceive men with a type of Gospel and a type of faith that is similar to the one the 9 lepers had and that Judas Iscariot had and that Hebrews 6 talks about and James talks about in chapter 2. This is a faith in Jesus that helps us do our best now.

Now, wait a minute, isn't that kind of very similar to those who are putting quarters and burning incense and chocolate milk and fruit to a dead, cold idol in a store in Decatur, Alabama or on every street corner in Brazil and every street corner in India? What are they doing? They're just going through a few motions and doing a few things so that they can have a better life now. What's the difference? It's a superstitious, self-consumed, fleshly religion. It's not what this one Samaritan leper had when he came back and honored and worshiped Jesus. What a difference he had.

True faith in contrast sees the greatness of our sin. It sees the greatness of our guilt. It sees the greatness of the wrath of God that is against us. True faith trembles at the thought that God is holy and God is just and it is perfectly right and righteous for him to crush us in his holy justice as sinners. True faith clings to the mercy and grace offered us in Jesus Christ, the only thing that can cleanse us and pardon us being the wretches that we are. True saving faith is humbled by this great salvation. That's why Jesus said, "You're well off your own track when you're poor in spirit. You're well off, you're blessed." That's what it means, blessed. "You're well off your own track when you mourn." What does he mean? He means that you know what you are. You're beginning to see what you really are and it makes you poor in spirit and mournful.

But he doesn't just leave us there. There is a corresponding joy in that too. Both are true. True saving faith is so grateful for the greatness of God's love for sinners like us to forgive us and show us grace and mercy. True saving faith is willing to suffer and be rejected by this world if necessary to please and honor and worship our Lord.

You know, when this Samaritan came back and knelt in worship of Jesus, he put everything on the line because the Jews and the Samaritans would hate him for it. But publicly, he professed his faith in Jesus Christ. He didn't just use Jesus for healing, he became a worshiper of Jesus for the rest of his life. Don't use Jesus for your healing.

Learn to love him and worship him whether he heals or not, whether life gets better or not. Do what's true and what's right.

So we're willing for rejection. We're willing for dishonor. We carry our cross in this world that when necessary, if necessary, because our joy is not in this world, our joy is in Jesus Christ. Our joy and our hope is not in this world, it's in the new heaven and in the new earth which he will create in which we will dwell with him for all eternity. And within every true faith soul, there is a bottomless well of gratitude for our Savior and for our salvation. This guy came back with loud thanksgivings.

Now, I'm not saying that we are drawing from that bottomless well of gratitude like we ought to all the time. Sometimes we need to be stirred up to get your gratitude practice back in line. To get your thanksgiving back where it ought to be. I've counseled with people through the years who are depressed and discouraged. Without exception, when I require them to begin writing out everything they ought to be thankful for and they wrote out things and I made them keep going and keep going and I made them for a week go to God and pray those blessings and thanksgivings back to God, they overcame their depression and discouragement. Every time. It may take some work to get started, now. The Bible doesn't just say "Thank him because you feel like it all the time." But it works every time if you're a true child of God.

Within our souls resides that bottomless well of gratitude and the longer we live and the longer we learn and the longer we grow, the deeper our humility and the deeper our gratitude and thanksgiving is to our Savior and for our salvation. Now look, be careful because this is a learned process. When you first come to know Jesus, you love him but you don't really know him that well yet. But as you grow, the gratitude grows. As you mature, the gratitude matures. Studying this this week, I was just overwhelmed again with gratitude. "Oh God, how good you are. How blessed. How many blessings you have given me." We were driving our car to go see Claire yesterday and Pam and I were talking and I said, "Pam, I'm intoxicated with Jesus Christ. Thank you for making me study and preach." I get paid for doing something that blesses my socks off. What a blessing it is.

As I left my baby daughter in Chattanooga after the ballgame, went out to eat. We were about to leave town and I said, "Baby, what are you going to do?" She said, "I'm going to church. We've got a missions meeting at church." I said, "Okay." I got in my car and my heart just swelled with gratitude. Now look, my kids can blow it and mess up just like yours but isn't that good of God to put a kid off in college and they're not going to spend Saturday night hanging or running or going to a party, "but I won't drink." "I'm going to a missions meeting at church." Do you know why? Because God has done something in her heart. And you know where a whole lot of my gratitude went? To Christ and to Christ's church. My girls if they genuinely do love and know God and I'm convinced they do, their faith is greatly due to your influence. It takes a church to raise a child. We were never meant to raise them on our own. It takes all of us together. Many of you don't even know. You've been like a spiritual brother or spiritual sister or spiritual uncle or spiritual

grandfather or spiritual peer and you have mightily reinforced the truth and the Gospel and the faith that I have taught them in my home.

So I get in my car driving back home with my heart soaring with gratitude. God didn't have to do that. I could be like so many other good pastors who tried to lead the church to the truth and got fired for it and some have really tried to do that but they didn't succeed in God's grace and Providence. God is so good.

But this gratitude grows the longer we grow. In 1965, Bill Gaither captured this journey of increasing gratitude in these simple lyrics.

"The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows,
The more that I love Him, the more love He bestows;
Each day is like heaven, my cup overflows,
The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows."

Amen.

Let's stand together in prayer.