

## **Irvington Presbyterian Church**

PO Box 1336 4181 Irvington Avenue, Fremont, CA 94538

510-657-3133

[www.irvingtonpres.org](http://www.irvingtonpres.org)

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### **Thanks**

Larry Thorson

#### **Luke 17:11-19**

*“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 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”*

New International Version

Thanks. What a simple word. It’s a way to express our appreciation for what another did for us. Thanks. I like how it sounds. Today I want to say thanks to those wonderful people who stepped up to be elders and deacons in our church. Without them the work of ministry would be greatly hindered. When I get a chance I want to say thanks to the children of our church, some of whom have the best attendance of anyone in our whole church. Thanks. Thanks also to those who sacrifice worship time to teach them. Thanks. Thanks to all the people in our church who faithfully give their money, year after to keep the doors of this church open even whether they’ve liked the

direction of the church or not. You kept going. Thanks. You're making ministry happen on this corner. Thanks. It's a word we shouldn't have any problem saying and it has a profound impact both on the person who says it and the person who receives it.

That's why I'm so glad we as a nation have what amounts to a four day holiday that celebrates the word. It's not like Columbus Day or President's Day that only the stores and the post office seem to remember. Thanksgiving even has its own meal which I'm very much looking forward to. But may we do more than just eat a lot on that day. Saying thank you is really important for our well being.

### **Ten Lepers**

Which brings us to our very familiar story today in Luke 17:11-19. The setting was a road along the border between Samaria and Galilee where Jesus encountered a group of ten men. They were hanging out together outside of town because they were lepers who were isolated from the rest of the population. Reviewing a little about leprosy is important to understanding this story about thanks.

While leprosy has largely disappeared from the western world, we tend to forget what a horrible disease it really is. Mother Teresa worked with lepers for many years in India and it's still found in parts of Africa and Asia.

What I've read of leprosy, one can carry this disease for years before the symptoms appear. Leprosy first appears as nodules on your skin which grow larger and larger, until they force deep wrinkles all over your body. Then your lips, nose and ear lobes grow thicker, until your face begins to resemble that of an animal. Ulcerations appear everywhere on the body, which cause our arms and legs to be mutilated. Fingers and toes begin to fall off and as the disease continues to progress, leaves the victim blinded.

For many centuries, as soon as one was diagnosed a leper, they would be completely cut off from the community. Even as late as 2015 on the island of Molokai in Hawaii eight patients still remained sequestered at a camp. The plan then was when the last one dies, a monument would be erected to the 8,000 leprosy patients who once lived there.

In such a place you would have to wear mourning clothes, living as if you had died. You would have to keep your head uncovered, your lips veiled and everywhere you went, cry out, "Unclean, unclean!" in order to warn others from getting near you. In Jesus' day lepers lived outside the village, in caves or open pits reserved for them. They spent their days begging for food and nights waiting to die.

In likely desperation, these ten men called out to Jesus from across the road. They wouldn't have dared get close to him for fear of being stoned by nearby Jews. "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" Ok, what does that even mean? What good did they think Jesus having pity on them would do? They couldn't even bring themselves to ask for healing. All they could ask for was pity. They were in a mess of a situation.

### **Jesus' Response to the Lepers**

Jesus' response to them is fascinating. He says "*Go, show yourselves to the priests.*" The instruction for healing in those days was that **after** you were healed you were to go show yourself to the priests who would verify your cleansing and reinstate you in society. Understand that a leper would never go to a priest unless he had been healed. But Jesus was commanding them to go even before they would have been certain they had been healed. He was making them take a faith step. That's not unusual with Jesus in how he deals with us. We ask Jesus for something then he expects us to take a step of faith to get it.

If you were a leper in the condition I described, do you think you would have gone to the priests as Jesus told you to? I don't know if I would have. He

seems to have commanded them to go without giving them any evidence of being healed. Luke says in verse 14: *And as they went, they were cleansed.* They were healed along the way which means they wouldn't have likely had a chance to thank Jesus for the healing while they were near him. That's important to realize. When they left Jesus, they're weren't yet healed. But they went anyway and then they experienced Jesus' healing. Now they had something to give thanks for.

### **The Man Who Returned to Say Thanks**

Of the ten lepers, only one returned to thank him after seeing the priest. In verse 16 Luke reveals to us for the first time that the man who returned was a Samaritan. That's important information. Samaria was basically made up of the northern tribes of Israel. David and Solomon's kingdom of the twelve tribes of Jacob had had a serious split. The northern tribes did a lot more inter marrying among the original folks in their land which was against what God had commanded them. They also mixed their religion with the worship of what the Bible would call false gods. Because they intermarried, these folks were looked down on by the Jews for being half breeds. Meanwhile, the two tribes that made up the southern kingdom were considered the true remnant of Israel. If you were a good Jew in Jesus' day, you would have nothing to do with half breeds. Racial prejudice was fairly high there and Jesus often told stories to oppose such prejudice. This was one of those stories. The story of the Good Samaritan is another one of those stories.

In verse 18 Jesus asks this man *"Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"* Noticed that even Jesus called him a foreigner. That too is important to realize.

Think about this, Jesus wants us to know it was a foreigner of all people, specifically what they would have considered a hated Samaritan, not a temple going Jewish man, who was the one who returned to give thanks. This is part of the point of the story because Jesus' audience, the Jewish leaders, wouldn't

have expected anything worthwhile to come out of this untouchable of the untouchables.

A lot of good temple going Jews in his day believed that interracial marriage especially with a pagan worshipper was an unequal yoke. They looked on these people as living in disobedience to God and consequently cursed. They would have seen the whole leprosy disease problem as a visible curse from God just as some today are seeing the fires in California as God's judgment against our liberal politics. For the good Bible believing Jews of Jesus' day leprosy was proof to them that these Samaritans were living in sin and trying to pass their sin on to good Jews. That was pretty harsh. But don't fool yourself; our culture has plenty of untouchables that good church going folks treat as if they're cursed people. Think about who they might be.

### **Saying Thanks is Part of the Healing Process**

It was a person least expected to return thanks who is 1) faithful to go do what Jesus told him to do (go to the priest) and 2) most grateful for his healing who returns to give thanks. From a psychological point of view, the act of expressing gratitude would be part of the healing process. The other nine did as they were told and went to the priest meaning they were healed physically, but probably not emotionally. But we're not fully healed until we can return and say thanks.

That's the main reason why we need to come to worship each week: to practice saying thank you to God for healing us of whatever we've been healed of. Coming to worship is thanking God in front of others and making it possible for others to thank God as well. Sometimes in the midst of discouraging news it's hard to say thank you but that's part of the healing process we need to practice on a regular basis.

There's an old hymn sung for years called "Now Thank We All Our God." It's Hymn #788 in our Celebration Hymnal. It was written during the Thirty Years War in Germany, in the early 1600s. Its author was a Lutheran pastor

named Martin Rinkart, in the town of Eilenburg in Saxony. Eilenburg was a walled city, so it became a haven for refugees seeking safety from the fighting. But eventually the city became too crowded and food became in short supply. Then, a famine and a terrible plague hit and Eilenburg became a giant morgue.

In one year alone, Pastor Rinkart conducted funerals for 4,500 people, including his own wife. The war dragged on; the suffering continued. Yet through it all, he never lost courage or faith and even during the darkest days of Eilenburg's agony, he was able to write these words of this hymn:

*"Now thank we all our God, with hearts and hands and voices, Who wondrous things hath done, In whom the world rejoices ...[So] keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed, and free us from all ills, in this world and the next."*

Even when he was waist deep in destruction, Pastor Rinkart was able to lift his sights to a higher plane. He kept his mind on God's love when the world was filled with hate. He kept his mind on God's promises of heaven when the earth was a living hell. He did it by finding a way to say thanks despite his circumstances.

### **Conclusion – Practice Saying Thank You Every Day**

Jesus died for our sins so that we could have a relationship with God our Creator. When did you last thank him for that specific gift? That's why every meeting of our elders always begins with a time of worship and giving thanks to God for blessing us. Then we have a time of prayer when we say thank you to God for some of the many blessings we have. That's why before the offering I always remind you that all offerings, whether silent prayers or money are ways of saying thanks. That's what your pledge card for 2019 is. It's an exercise in giving thanks. That exercise brings healing to our soul.

Thanks. Practice saying it multiple times to multiple people every day. Do it while driving, in stores, in banks and everywhere you go. Surprise someone with a thanks they didn't even expect. What a powerful word.

Whatever you're going through right now, it will be immensely better when you say thanks. May you practice that today and especially this week of Thanksgiving. May you have a great holiday this week saying thanks.

# **TO LEARN MORE**

**Join a Life Group**

**510/657-3133**

**To learn and encourage one another**

## **IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's ideal**

**Romans 3:23-24**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 5:8**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life**

**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below...**

*"Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me."*