



good shepherd  
presbyterian church

## **Turning Back to Worship**

Luke 17:11-21

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Today I want to tell you a STORY... about giving God GLORY... and how giving THANKS helps us turn back to God again and again in an attitude of worship.

### **Story**

Here's the STORY: You probably know the short version. Jesus healed ten men with leprosy and only one comes back to say "thank you." Actually, upon hearing their cry for mercy, Jesus sends them to the priest to verify that they are healed and on the way they are healed. It is at that point that one of the ten stops and runs back to Jesus to thank him. This story is often lifted up as an example of the importance of being thankful, and rightfully so. But there is a lot more going on here than we usually realize. For one there is a wonderful picture of the interplay between human prayer ("Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"), a godly response that is not instantaneous, but involves our faith and participation ("Go and show yourselves to the priests."), and a miraculous answer to prayer ("as they were going, they were cleansed.")

There is also the whole dynamic of the one who returned being a Samaritan. In fact, this was probably the main point for including this story, as Luke includes the reaction of the Pharisees in conjunction with this interaction with a doubly-unclean man (leper AND Samaritan). That won't be our focus today, but don't miss this central point: God is at work beyond the walls of our churches. That's something that takes on fresh meaning now as we are no longer meeting within the walls of our church. We must continue to look for God's presence and work far outside our comfort zones. And that is what is meant by God's "glory".

## **Glory**

When we talk about God's GLORY we mean God's goodness (what God has done) and God's greatness (who God is). Our other scripture readings from Psalm 105 and Isaiah 12 celebrated both these aspects of God's glory. Each walked through God's deeds and God's character, God's goodness and greatness.

*God's Goodness* – When the man realized he had been healed of the terrible and isolating disease of leprosy, he turned back from his mission to see the priests and have himself declared healed and he returned to Jesus and “gave thanks to him.” (v. 16) In response to his prayers for mercy or help, Jesus had responded and God had been good to him. The man was thankful and immediately went to say so.

*God's Greatness* – The man in the story was also thankful for God's greatness, or who God is. We see this expressed twice: in v. 15 when he is found “glorifying God with a loud voice” and in v. 18 when Jesus describes his thanks in terms of “giving glory to God.” Jesus equates “giving glory” then with thanks.

This shows thanks to not only be a “thank you for what you did for me” but an “everybody look how amazing and awesome God is!” Indeed, the man is public with this expression of thanks, as he offers these words (and perhaps gestures) “with a loud voice” on his way back to see Jesus. Said another way, this kind of God-oriented thanks – publicly focusing on who God is – is a form of worship because worship is simply “declaring God's worth.” We see another aspect of this worshipful thanks after all the public glory-giving, when the man falls on his face at Jesus feet, also an expression of extreme humility and respect, and appropriate to a posture of worship.

## **Thanks**

That leads to a final comment. The Pharisees were missing it. They had asked Jesus when God's kingdom was going to come. (v. 20) Jesus said it would not be with “signs to be observed” – that's stuff like comets and alignment of planets and such – nor would it be ‘here’ or ‘there.’ Instead, he says, “Behold (look!) it is in your midst.” In other words, it is already here and it's all around you. That's the assumption behind my favorite question: What is God doing and how can you be a part? I assume, with Jesus' teaching, that God is at work in and around us, in the church and outside the church. And right now

“outside the church” is all we’ve got! What a great opportunity to open our eyes and see God’s glory!

So as an exercise and takeaway I want to suggest an acronym to help use thanks to turn back again (and again) to worship, to giving God glory. Pray through the letters of “thanks” – that is, T-H-A-N-K-S.

- T** – like the one man in the story, remember to say “thank you” to God for all that he has done, is doing, and will do
- H** – approach God in humility as the leprous man who “bowed low in worship” (v.16)
- A** – when you pray and as you live offer God adoration for who He is, just as the man “praised with a loud voice” (v.15) and “gave praise” (v.18)
- N** – pray not as those without faith, but with the encouragement from Jesus that “your faith has made you well”; faith was not a magic suspension of belief, but a trusting participation in what Jesus gave him do to → “go and show yourself to the priest”
- K** – recognize that God’s Kingdom is in our midst (vv.20-21); even in these times of “social distancing” and “shelter in place” God is in our midst! God does not reside in Temples made with human hands, but is active and on the move in the world!
- S** – set aside time for God in your daily life; the man paused and “turned back” (v.15) on his way to the priest because he recognized what God had done.

Right now, today, this week, as we stay home and wonder what is going on... right now is the time to turn again and again to worship. This is not a shutting out the world to be alone with God. It is turning to God in trusting obedience, giving God glory for who He is and what He is doing right now in the hearts and lives of people in our community and our world. Pray for that; join in that; look for an opportunity to be God’s people. It is a unique opportunity to BE the church.