

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

JESUS IS THE ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR

1. WHO ACCEPTS THANKS (11-16)

2. WHO EXPECTS THANKS (17-19)

In the name of our Almighty and Merciful Savior, Jesus Christ, dear friends,

We learn from the youngest age that when someone does something nice for you, you are to say thank you. Depending on what has been done for us, what we have received, our specific situation or our earthly means, that thanks can take many forms. If an adult does something very nice for one of you kids, I don’t think anyone expects you to say thank you by taking them out to a fancy restaurant. But depending on what someone does for your parents, your mom and dad might say thank you by doing just that. Flowers, a gift, a thank you note, a quick text or email, a hug or even just a smile gets the point across—we appreciate what someone did for us. It expresses our gratitude, our thankfulness.

The subject of thankfulness takes center stage today as we look in on something that happened in Jesus’ life. This event tells us something about him and gives us direction for our life of faith. As he was making his way down to Jerusalem, Jesus revealed that he is THE ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR WHO ACCEPTS THANKS AND WHO EXPECTS THANKS.

It happens often enough, doesn’t it, that we do something nice for someone else and they start thanking us and we “shush” them? No thanks are necessary—and we mean it. We were really just happy to do whatever it is we did. That’s kind of a nice thing, right? It means we’re doing it for the right reasons...and making someone else feel good is thanks enough.

We might think then that this is the way God should be. He just does good things because that’s the way he is—no thanks are necessary. But that is not the way God talks about himself at all—it’s really just the opposite. God does do great things and he *is* kind and loving and he *is* the giver of every perfect gift, but he gladly accepts our thanks and even expects our thanks! Today we see this in Jesus, the true Son of God. Jesus was travelling through the country that bordered Samaria and Galilee. You’ll remember that the Samaritans lived in the north and were kind of “mutts” in the eyes of purebred Jews. The mix of nationalities and races began a good 700 years prior to this when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. Many Jewish people were deported; lots of foreigners were brought in; intermarriage and a mixture of religions followed. So by this time, Samaritans were looked down upon by the Jews...more than that, really. They hated them. They made every effort to avoid them because of their mixed-race and their impure worship.

But Jesus didn't avoid them. He treated them as souls who needed his help and who needed to know him as their Savior. This is obvious today as we hear about Jesus travelling near Samaria and helping a group of people which included at least one Samaritan.

To the Jews, if there was anything worse than a bunch of Samaritans, it was a band of lepers. The infectious skin disease of leprosy, which degenerated and deformed the body, made them unclean and required them to live apart from the community. They were to warn those who approached by calling out "*Unclean!*" It seems that the group of ten men who had leprosy was a mixture of Jews and Samaritans who were willing to mingle together under the circumstances. Knowing just that little bit about leprosy helps us to understand what happened as Jesus approached a certain village.

Going back to the instructions from God recorded in Leviticus, the priest was always the one who determined whether a person had a chronic skin disease that would exclude them from the community. You can only imagine what it would have been like to not be near your friends and family, not to be able to hold your children or hug your wife or husband, to not join with others for worship, to be isolated from everyday life and regular people. These men were living that existence as they endured a disease that ate away at their bodies and caused them to become deformed.

How difficult must it have been to suffer both physically and emotionally! Is it any wonder that they wasted no time in calling out to Jesus as he was coming into the village? Was Jesus hungry? Tired from the journey? Busy with something? It didn't matter to these men. We know of a time already more than two years prior to this when Jesus healed a man with leprosy, even being so bold as to touch the man. He had healed others over these years. Surely these stories had wide circulation and had reached these men. They had heard about Jesus and what he could do and they weren't going to let him pass by without trying. They stood at a distance, as they were required to do and **called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"** This was a desperate cry from desperate men. Neither medicine nor time was going to heal them. Their only hope was a miracle. And that's what they were asking of Jesus. Would he, in mercy, heal them and give them new life and a future?

Right away Jesus looks at them and gives his answer: **"Go, show yourselves to the priests."** And his power and compassion are on immediate display. **As they went, they were cleansed. JESUS IS THE ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR.**

Consider what Jesus had done for these men. He had not only cured their physical pain and defects, he had restored their very lives. They would be free to live with their families once again, to rejoin their friends, to shop in the market and go to church again! Only a powerful miracle of mercy could have saved them and that is what they received from Jesus!

And yet there was a problem. Nine out of ten cleansed lepers never thought to thank Jesus for giving them life and hope and a future. Presumably they completed the journey to see the priest, got the stamp of good health, and went off to enjoy this tremendous gift they had been given. Incredible ingratitude.

The lone bright spot was, as it turned out, a Samaritan. One of those mixed-breed, screwed-up religion, undesirables. HE turned back around when he realized he was cleansed of his disease so that he could thank Jesus. Listen again: **One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.**

And Jesus ACCEPTED HIS THANKS. God has always accepted the thanks and praises of his people. Think of Noah, Moses, Jacob, Joshua and others as far back as history goes. Think of how they would offer prayers of thanks or stack up rocks as a monument of thanks to the Lord or build an altar to give thanks. Think of how Miriam led a song of thanks and praise to God after he had saved his people from the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Think of how Ethan the Ezrahite used part of his psalm to thank God (okay, you might have to look that one up!). Or think of the many psalms of David where he thanks and praises God. Think of the thankful praise of Jesus' mother Mary after an angel told her that she was chosen by the Lord to bring the Savior into the world. God has always accepted the praises of his people in response to his acts of power and love. And here Jesus, true God, ACCEPTED THANKS from this healed leper after he showed himself to be the ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR.

But we should also know that Jesus *EXPECTS* THANKS. You can hear it in Jesus' voice, can't you? **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”** We should explain something here—Jesus wasn't bashing the foreigner. Not at all. HE ACCEPTED THE MAN'S THANKS. He had also ministered to Samaritans before. He had told a story which starred a Samaritan. No, the point is this: to many, this man would have seemed less likely to recognize the blessing of God and worship him for it. The purebred Jews who felt that they were superior as a race and in regard to worship, THEY selfishly accepted the blessing with no pause to praise and thank their Savior. That's simply not what you would have expected. It's not what Jesus expected either! He EXPECTED THANKS from them.

God has always EXPECTED THANKS from his people, hasn't he? Do you remember that he even prescribed something called a “Thank Offering” for his people to give? In addition, the sacrifices of the people and the requirement of the tithe were to acknowledge the power and mercy of God. THE ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL GOD has always EXPECTED THANKS from his people. As true God, Jesus EXPECTED THANKS from these men who were blessed by him.

You see the parallels to our lives, don't you? Today we face the very personal concern of our gratitude to God. I know a man here in town who required a pacemaker for his heart years ago. Years later he was examined and the doctors couldn't believe what they saw. The finest medical experts from high profile medical centers around the country were consulted and mystified at the correction that had taken place in his heart. He no longer needs a pacemaker. They took it out and they still cannot explain what happened. You hear of things like this occasionally. That kind of thing would be pretty close to what happened with these men, wouldn't it? Maybe you also have a personal story of God acting in your life in a dramatic way.

It sometimes happens that when we have serious health concerns, the number and intensity of our pleas to God increases. We call out like those 10 men did, *"Lord, have mercy on me!" "God, help me!"* But it also sometimes happens that the prayers of *thanks* to God are *not* as numerous, *not* as intensely grateful as the pleadings were...and sometimes forgotten altogether. We find ourselves better and we get back into our routines without so much as a thank you. *"Were you not cleansed? Is there no praise for God?"* Jesus might ask us.

It isn't only health either. Perhaps our difficult position is financial. Maybe we're not doing so well mentally or emotionally. It could be that we lack direction and purpose in life. It might be that we really don't have friends; we're lonely. Perhaps you can't find that person to marry. Maybe there is strife in your family. And with any of these things, we pray and we pray. And when we find an answer or some relief or a complete turnaround, it is easy enough for us to be so caught up in enjoying the blessing that we forget to turn away for a moment from the good thing that God has done. We forget to pause and give him the faith-filled thanks that he deserves, the kind that the Samaritan leper gave to Jesus.

JESUS ACCEPTS that kind of THANKS and even EXPECTS that kind of THANKS. Think about it—the ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR has looked at your situation and he has blessed you! That is an awesome thing! How selfish are we when we act like the 9 who went on enjoying their blessing without ever acknowledging the giver! God tells us that he looks for thankful responses in our prayers, with offerings, in worshiping him, with the everyday living by his Word. THE ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR says this in Psalm 50: **Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me (v.14-15).**" God WANTS us to call upon him when we're in trouble! And when his deliverance comes, as it came for those 10 lepers, God says to honor him! GOD EXPECTS THANKS. It's pretty clear—we're not perfect at this. We're pretty good at the crying out for help sometimes, but not always great at returning to give thanks.

But we are blessed yet again. THE ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR sacrificed himself on Calvary's cross to pay for our ingratitude. In fact, when these events happened, Jesus was on his final trip to Jerusalem, the journey that would end at the cross. There he paid for the ingratitude of the 9 lepers and for ours too. We find forgiveness in Jesus' death.

In that forgiveness we see just how merciful our Savior has been to us and this leads us to love him even more. We become acutely aware again of how much we have to thank him for! Our desire to thank him in all the ways he is expecting it is perked up! We have a reference point in the Samaritan leper—a place we can look back to and be reminded that we too have been blessed by Jesus and we too have reason to give him thanks!

Jesus told the man, **“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”** This was to be a reminder to the man that his faith in Jesus to bless him in his time of need was not misplaced. The fact that he thanked God for this healing was another step in the right direction. We don't know what happened to the man after this; Scripture never says. But if he continued to put his faith in Jesus and saw him as the one who healed his disease of sin as well, then we will see him in heaven one day.

The ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL SAVIOR gave the lepers life and hope and a future. Hasn't Jesus done the same and more for us? His blessing gives us every reason to give him the thanks he deserves and is looking for from his people. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.