

Normally I'm the one that calls this particular kind of craziness out. Halloween costumes in the stores before Labor Day. Christmas items waiting on shelves in the middle of September. Commercials on TV and radio for layaway at stores for Christmas gifts by October. And the biggest of them all, playing Christmas music in the grocery store and on the radio starting November 1st. Please understand, I have nothing against Christmas or Halloween. I'm very pro-Christmas. I can do without Halloween, but that's me. What I am against is pushing holidays so that we lose sight of where we really are on the calendar. Let's pass Labor Day before Halloween makes its entrance. Let's get to Halloween before Christmas comes out. And let's not forget about the one that gets almost completely lost.

I normally call it out. And no, it's not Thanksgiving Day. But we're going to spend some time talking about giving thanks. Why should that be limited to just one day? Let's advance Thanksgiving Day to today. Giving thanks is central to the interaction Jesus had in the gospel with the lepers. That interaction allows us to think about what we have to give thanks for. It allows us to ask who we are giving thanks to. It may not be Thanksgiving Day, but we are going to...

**Glorify God with our thanks
For healing
For faith that saves eternally**

These ten men were brought together by a terrible skin disease. Lepers were shunned because they were infectious. They needed to live separate from everybody. Where their paths crossed with healthy people, the leper had to call out from a great distance so precautions could be taken. Not a lot of people were willing to help a leper. They often didn't get better. It was miserable and left the afflicted alone. But these ten men had each other. At the very least they could stay together and provide support.

Collectively when they heard Jesus was in their village they had to see him. **"As Jesus 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!"** Jesus wasn't an unknown. He had traveled around. He taught in many towns and villages. He performed miracles in public places and in private homes. A pretty good picture of Jesus was already likely known. Enough that these ten lepers came asking him for pity. But more than pity. More like mercy. They were asking for Jesus to show them mercy.

If someone afflicted with a skin disease in the time of the Old Testament thought they were healed they needed to show the priest. There was a lengthy procedure for verifying a healing. People went to the priest after healing had taken place. **"When Jesus saw them, he said, Go, show yourselves to the priests."** Now Jesus hadn't even said a word about healing. He hadn't touched them or looked at their problem closely. He simply said, go. They came to Jesus because of who they thought he was, a man who showed compassion on sick people. Jesus treated their leprosy like it was already healed. But it took a strong leper to listen to that direction without seeing results first. It took an even stronger God to give direction like that and make the healing happen. Along the way the lepers were healed.

These men had a reason to go to Jesus with their serious medical condition. When we're sick, have a cold, or experiencing allergies, where do we go? If our health is in jeopardy because of a very serious virus or disease that infects our bodies, who do we call first? If we're in need, do we ask anyone for help with groceries, making food, or caring for our home? We can admit there have been times of sickness and physical problems where we sought a doctor, emergency room, or medicine first. Jesus was a contact, but not first.

Healing the ten lepers showed the power Jesus had. He created wind and waves, birds and fish. He set the human body to run with precision. Healing the body demonstrated his compassion for people with all kinds of needs. Your medical needs are not too little for Jesus. In fact he knows the diagnosis without seeing you for an appointment. He doesn't run tests to determine what action to take. Jesus knows exactly what you face today. He knows the next cold, the next major ailment. Best of all he knows how far each will go. For some he brings healing quickly sparing suffering by his mercy. Some he lets linger, in his mercy allowing the pain to work a stronger deeper trust in him. Some he lets go all the way to death, in mercy using that particular physical ailment to bring us home.

That's God's compassion. The lepers experienced it and so have you. The lepers simply trusted in Jesus, and so have you. You trust in one you can't see. He controls everything in your life for your eternal good. You trust the one who promises you so much. Since you have received physical healing, you trust in Jesus, give thanks. Give thanks for doctors and nurses who have wonderful skills. Give thanks to care givers who take care of us, elderly parents, and grandparents when we can't. Thank the pharmacist, technicians, aides, and service staff. Thank them all for what they do. But more than that, thank the one who oversees it all. Give thanks to God for providing skilled medical workers, medicines, surgeons, nurses, and care workers. God puts them there at just the right time. Give glory to God with your thanks for healing.

Jesus responded to the ten lepers' cry for mercy. He responded with mercy and physical healing. They received relief for their misery. Ten went away diseased and ten experienced miraculous healing. Nine presumably went further and showed the priests. Presumably those nine did what Jesus asked them and maybe thought they were doing the right thing. Nine walked away healed, resumed their place in society, and presumably forgot about Jesus. **"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."** One returned.

Jesus wanted all ten to return. **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?”** He was disappointed because Jesus wanted more for them than just physical healing. That wouldn't help them eternally. Jesus would do something more for them, something he would do for all of us. Christ's mercy goes further than physical healing to something deeper. Jesus wanted these ten lepers saved from their sins. He wanted them to know his mercy that saved them eternally.

One did respond. Jesus himself says that one had faith. His return to worship Jesus wasn't prompted by anything in him. He returned because faith had been worked in his heart by the Holy Spirit and motivated him to give thanks to the one who mercifully healed him. He couldn't help but glorify God. Jesus rescued him from something he couldn't hope to do anything about himself. He was infected with leprosy and Jesus handled that. He was infected with sin. Jesus had mercy on this man over that too. Jesus was the Savior. This man knew it. He was convinced of it. He was responding with faith that saves eternally.

Are we sometimes pressing forward like those nine lepers? Maybe thinking we're doing the right thing by being strong, working, and living life as if nothing is wrong? Other times we might think showing weakness is bad. We must face Satan, evil enemies, the weight of our guilt alone. We've got to win against Satan. We need to bear our guilt because we deserve to. It's that, or ignore it, forget it, and hope it doesn't bother us again. We feel ashamed to admit we have problems and need help. We figure we should be stronger and better at fighting off Satan by now. We're ashamed of this guilt we still carry but can't seem to shake. Sinfully we don't want anyone to think anything less of us.

God's mercy in Christ is for you. Christ Jesus extends his mercy to you for more than physical, but spiritual as well. Listen as he commends the one leper who returned, **“Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner...rise and go: your faith has made you well”** This leper's faith saved him because of who it was focused on. It rested on Jesus' mercy. That mercy is what your faith is focused on. Jesus gave his perfect life in mercy, no physical or spiritual weaknesses. He gave it so you would have a perfect life to call your own. It comes from Christ. It's his mercy. Jesus saves you. He alone rescues you from the impossible situations you face. Jesus rescues you from Satan's attacks. He alone can face them down and win, and he does it for you. Jesus rescues you from your evil enemies. Jesus forgives you your sins and your guilt. His mercy lifts it away. Your faith knows these things. You have faith that saves eternally.

With that faith and Christ's mercy, be that one who returns to give thanks. It's natural to return to Christ. It's right to thank him for his rescue. Thank him for his forgiveness and forgive others as you have been forgiven. Thank him for relieving you of the burden of guilt and help others to know their burden of guilt has been removed in Christ too. Thank him for sending a Savior and share that Savior with others in your life. Glorify God with your thanks for faith that saves eternally.

Of course it isn't Thanksgiving Day, but don't let that stop you from giving thanks. Give thanks today and every day. As you think about what Christ Jesus has done for you, both physical healing in life and spiritual healing daily, how could you not give thanks? Glorify God with your thanks for healing and for your faith that saves eternally!