

## What Are You Waiting For?

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Identity, Purpose, Belonging / Thanksgiving / Luke 17:11-19

### Notes

Maybe Pg. 133-134 in Who Am I Lord? on prodigal son  
pg. 85-... Hidden faces

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Imagine with me, 2009, just 15 years ago. There was a lady by the name of Iby who had lived in New Jersey. She was the owner of a real estate business, she was used to organizing events, a full social calendar, a husband and two children at home. A patch of dry skin appeared on her knee. It quickly spread over her whole body except her face and she was diagnosed with acute psoriasis, an autoimmune disease that causes skin cells to build up and form scales and itchy, dry patches. She hated looking at herself, wearing long clothes to cover up to get people to stop staring. She recounts how sometimes when she got up from a chair, people exclaimed in shock, wondering where the “dust” on the floor had suddenly appeared from. Then the stigma came. She was among the weekend guests at a party in her friend's house - she was given a mattress on the floor in the basement while everyone else retired to guest bedrooms upstairs. She became very depressed. Her children were invited with a youth group to do volunteer work in her home country of Nigeria, of which her children begged her to come along, and reluctantly she agreed.

While there she was approached by a former school mate to do charity work to leprosy colonies in Nigeria. She was shocked that leprosy still existed. She went to a Leprosy Hospital where she learned that the hospital provided accommodations for patients who could no longer return to their original communities due to stigmatism. Even after they are cured from the disease that is treatable within six to 12 months. They remain there with their families, their children attending school within the premises. She understood some of their story. As Iby says, "I knew what it was to be abandoned, to be stared at." On her return to the US she began the charity Hope's Door, a foundation she set up which focuses on three leprosy colonies in southern and northern Nigeria.

The passage for today comes from Luke 17:11-19

Early on in the passage it says ten lepers approach Jesus. No mention of anything other than that they were lepers. These ten were undistinguishable in their misery. All differences of character, race, education meant nothing, obliterated, as they were a community shunned by everyone around them. You see back then if you had leprosy you were isolated and at the mercy of the community for your survival. "Leprosy" was a term used to designate a number of skin diseases, so the fundamental problem of these ten was not necessarily physically life-threatening, though it

could be. Instead, they were faced with a debilitating social disorder. Regarded as living under a divine curse and as ritually unclean, they were relegated to the margins of society. The Old Testament law required you to cry out, “Unclean, unclean” all the days on which you remained unclean. Lepers tended to roam together, looking for food, begging for assistance from a great distance, learning to yell in loud voices, both from the need to warn others, and to beg for help from across the way. It must have been horrible to have been removed from friends and family for potentially a lifetime, and to have been forced to announce that removal on a daily basis. How difficult it must have been to be required to be the prophet of your own uncleanness, the herald of your own unworthiness before God. This is why the lepers keep their distance from Jesus and get his attention just as he is entering the village. They cry out to Jesus, “Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us.” The word Master, when used elsewhere in the Gospel of Luke denotes one who has authority consistent with miraculous power, exactly what the lepers are using the term for here. So, (1) How did these ten lepers know Jesus by name, and (2) How did they know him to be an agent of miraculous power? This name is used for Jesus only by his disciples elsewhere; how did these lepers come to such awareness? These ten lepers were regarded as outsiders, the marginalized, and yet who respond to Jesus in faithful ways.

Jesus says to all ten of them, right after they call out to him for mercy, to go to the priests to show themselves. You see, once a person is believed to be healed from leprosy they were to go to the priest to show them that they were no longer infected so that they could return to normal human contacts. Jesus' pronounces no great healing formula. Nothing dramatic. He doesn't touch them. He utters a simple command: go and let the priests see you. They don't wait. The ten head off with no mention that they have been healed. It is only after they go that the healing takes place. All ten exercised faith in what Jesus said by starting for the priests and when they did, healing came.

Often, Jesus gives us what we desire not before we need it, but in the doing. Were they cleansed by works? No, they were cleansed by faith. It was faith that led them to obey. If they had not believed, they would not have gone. If they hadn't believed they might not have been healed. 9 of the 10 do exactly what the law requires of them. They go to the priest.

One though comes back, before continuing to the priest. It is mentioned that when he saw he was healed he came back. The others were healed but no mention of stopping to see. This one, a Samaritan, and from this it is assumed the other 9 are Jews. Remember the Samaritans and the Jews despise each other (though in this case leprosy brought them together). Luke makes sure to mention that

the Samaritan proclaims with a loud voice (so couldn't the other 9 hear these praises to God?). It's the Samaritan foreigner who returns with thanks—not the nine Jewish people. Does he come back first to give thanks before he heads to the priest, or is it that he knows Jesus is the great High Priest? The Jews take him for granted and don't even give thanks, but this man outside the covenant of Israel recognizes what has happened and falls down in worship. Unlike the other lepers, this one perceives that he has been the recipient of divine benefaction and that at the hand of Jesus. He does 3 things: praises God, falls at Jesus' feet, and thanks Jesus.

God's character is manifest in his provision of mercy even to the ungrateful. While all 10 were cleansed visually on the outside it was the Samaritan who recognized that he had received divine benefits from Jesus. He was right to come to Jesus and give praise to God. This implies not only that God is worthy of praise (a point already well established in the narrative), but also that the fitting location from which to offer such praise is at the feet of Jesus. Worded differently, one appropriately gives praise to God via one's grateful submission to Jesus as master or lord, the "location," so to speak, of God's beneficence. Luke presents Jesus in the role of the temple - as one in whom the powerful and merciful presence of God is realized and before whom the God of the temple can be worshiped

(whether in Jerusalem for the Jews or Mount Gerizim for the Samaritans).

As John Walton and Andrew Hill write, “Since the beginning of the church, identifying the blessing that comes through Abraham, has seemed obvious. God brought blessing to the world through Abraham and his family by means of the child born in the Bethlehem manger, the God-man who hung on a cross and died and then left a tomb empty on the third day. Everything else pales before this blessing above all blessings. But although this is surely the climax of all of God’s blessings, we must doggedly investigate whether the life and work of Christ is the sum total of the blessing that was to come through Abraham’s family. We can start this investigation by inquiring about the range of blessings brought through Christ. Was salvation the only blessing he brought? (Certainly it would be enough if it were the only one, but we don’t want to neglect other important aspects). Our next thought might be of the blessing he provided to individuals as he healed them. But as we think about his ministry, we must expand his blessing to the way he taught about God and his kingdom. Indeed, there is no place to stop, and we begin to realize what a blessing it was for him to come and live. As important as Christ’s death was, his life was also a blessing. When we pause to think about it, we discover that all nations of the earth were blessed in

Christ, not just by the salvation he brought, but by the revelation he brought (John 1:4; Heb 1:1-2). Through him we know the Father (John 14:7) and we have a model for living (Ephesians 4:13, Ephesians 5:1–2, Philippians 2:5 ). Through him we become aware of what God’s kingdom is like and how its citizens ought to conduct themselves. Was Christ the beginning of that revelation? Not at all; he was the culmination of it.” End quote.

Jesus at the end of the passage says to the Samaritan, your faith has saved you. It is more than healing, for all ten were cleansed. But from his faith and sight he has gained more - insight into Jesus’ role in the inbreaking kingdom. He has faith and responds faithfully to the mercy he has received. It is on this basis, and not because of any status—whether measured either by ancestry and/or by ritual purity—that he receives salvation.

Shakespeare wrote "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin" suggesting that a shared experience of the natural world can create a sense of commonality or connection among people, regardless of their backgrounds, cultures, or differences, as leprosy did to these ten men, as skin disease did to Iby with those at the leprosy hospital in Nigeria. It can foster a feeling of unity and understanding among them. In simpler terms, it means that even though people might come from different places and have various perspectives, they can all find

something that they can relate to, which can bring them closer together. That's what Jesus does to us in this room. Jesus came to relate to us, to bring us closer to relationship with God, and closer in relationship together. Even though we come from different places and have various perspectives, we can look around this room, we see the beauty and wonder of nature that God has created, in the people and the fall beauty. It fosters a feeling of unity and understanding. In moments of gratitude, we find ourselves drawn closer to God, gripped in a sense of awe and wonder as we notice His gorgeous creation. It is through gratitude that we can demonstrate what we can do to support and love others, and to be as Jesus to those around us, in this case through the Foodbank, when we come together to love God and love our neighbour. We recognize that everything we have is a gift from Him, and it fills us with a deep sense of thankfulness. This awareness shifts our perspective from what we don't have to what we do.

Gratitude is more than just saying "thank you" to God for the good things that come our way. It is a way of life, a constant recognition of His abundant blessings in both the big and the small. It is an attitude that permeates our thoughts, words, and actions, shaping how we view the world. When we cultivate an attitude of gratitude, we become aware of the countless ways in which Jesus is at work in our lives, even in the midst of challenges and

difficulties. Through thankfulness, we nurture our relationship with God. As we seek to find reasons to be grateful, our hearts become attuned to His presence and love for us. Through gratitude, we can embrace the satisfaction of knowing that we are loved unconditionally by a God who cares for us deeply.

If you've been wondering what this is, I received this jar from my teaching partner the last full day we spent together at school in June. She went to current students, former students, and staff and they wrote me a note that I could open every school day of this year when I wasn't teaching. While this is not something I needed, I am grateful for the effort she went to and the time people took to send me a note. It reminds me of how grateful I am for the time I spent teaching, for the friends I met along the way, those students and families I was able to support and impact, the lessons I learned, and how much God helped and developed me through those times, but also of the miraculous works God was doing during this time, and continues to do, particularly when I left a secure job without knowing for sure what was going to happen.

God doesn't need our thanks. In fact, he doesn't need anything from us as it says in Acts 17:25 "nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things." But he asks us to give thanks. As it says in, 1 Thessalonians

5:18 “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Don't wait until the problems are over to start walking in faith. Don't put conditions on God. Reject the thought to say, "Lord, as soon as there's enough money, I'll follow your instructions." Or to pray, "Lord, if you'll just solve this issue in my family, I'll consistently to church." Don't put conditions on God! Instead, God places a demand for faith on us, before anything at all has changed.

Reflect on past blessings, remind yourself of the countless times God has provided for you, protected you, and carried you through challenges. It draws us towards God's faithfulness.

God might be saying to you, "Love me despite the disease. Obey me despite the lack of talent, or the lack of resources. Follow me now, despite the depression or anxiety. Say no to the temptation, while it still is difficult. Praise me in the darkest of nights, and in the worst of circumstances."

This is the nature of God, a God who loves you so much, He'll give you the opportunity to be thankful when nothing about your circumstances gives you that motivation. The very definition of faith. It is not outward circumstance, it is the presence or absence of a thankful spirit that makes a difference in our lives.

While on a short-term missions trip in 1996, Pastor Jack

Hinton from New Bern, North Carolina, was leading worship at a leper colony on the island of Tabango. There was time for one more song, so he asked if anyone had a request. A woman who had been facing away from the pulpit turned around.

The woman's nose and ears were entirely gone. The disease had destroyed her lips as well. She lifted a fingerless hand in the air and asked, 'Can we sing Count Your Many Blessings?'"

Overcome with emotion, Hinton left the service. He was followed by a team member who said, "Jack, I guess you'll never be able to sing that song again."

"Yes I will," Jack replied, "but I'll never sing it the same way.

I know some of you are in struggling circumstances, right now. And what awaits you today, this week, is a forcing of the question: Will you be thankful despite the difficult circumstances? Will you step out in faith and respond faithfully to the mercy you have received? Declare Him the great High Priest. Let God reveal himself to you. Often, Jesus gives us what we desire not before we need it, but in the stepping out. So, what are you waiting for?