

Series: The Joy of Giving
Title: Lessons from Lepers
Text: Luke 17:11-19
Key Word: Keys
Proposition: Everyone will open the door to a greater gift by utilizing these keys.

He lived a long time ago. He was English, yet born in Bombay, India. He wrote poetry. He also wrote such books as Captain Courageous, How the Leopard Got His Spots, and The Jungle Books.

Rudyard Kipling writings not only made him famous but also brought him a fortune. A newspaper reporter came up to him once and said, "Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over one hundred dollars a word."

The reporter reached into his pocket and pulled out a one hundred-dollar bill and gave it to Kipling and said, "Here's a one hundred dollar bill, Mr. Kipling. Now you give me one of your hundred dollar words."

Rudyard Kipling looked at the money, put it in his pocket and said, "Thanks!"

Well, the word "thanks" is certainly a one hundred dollar word. In fact, I would say it is more like a million-dollar word. It's a small word but it has a powerful meaning. It might only have 6 letters but it gets across a message that few other words are capable of achieving.

When that little word is missing, we feel it deeply. You know what it's like when someone doesn't say "thanks" – you feel hurt, used, ignored, and taken for granted and you wonder why you bothered to do something for the person in the first place.

We're closing out this series entitled, "The Joy of Giving." Today, we hope to discover that giving thanks opens the door to a greater gift. God loves us some much that He is not content with just our healing, He wants to make us well. I believe that the story of the ten lepers teaches us some important life lessons that unlock the door to a deeper work from God.

As we stop to think about it, God really has done a lot for us lately. He has forgiven and forgotten the mistakes of our past. He gives us strength and courage in our present difficulties. He promises to prepare us for the future that only He can see.

Let's take a few moments to see a few things we have in common with the ten lepers. They were ten wretched, forsaken, disheartened men. They were hopeless. They had leprosy, a disease for which there was no cure. In fact, leprosy was a death sentence carried out a little bit at a time—an arm now, a leg or ear later. Because the disease was thought to be highly contagious, lepers were driven out of town where they couldn't associate with anybody. Luke says, "*They stood at a distance.*" Their common misfortune and sin broke through racial and ethnic

barriers. They were hopeless, helpless, rejected and alone. Their need for love and mercy connected them.

I suspect that there isn't anyone present with leprosy. I would imagine though, that some feel "a far off." Personal, self-destructive habits make one feel helpless and out of control. Uncertain financial circumstances leave many feeling anxious and even hopeless. An unfriendly look or even a glaring stare leaves one feeling rejected. Divorce and bitterness creates its own painful loneliness. Such unresolved sins arouse ones need for God's mercy. It draws people together in a common search for healing and deliverance. Perhaps that is why we're here this morning. We're searching for a special gift, perhaps something that we can't even define. It's just some "feeling" that there has to be something more.

Hope surfaced as they heard about Jesus. Hope gave birth to faith. They began to feel there was a chance to live. They met Jesus and said to him, "*Master, have mercy upon us.*" Mercy is often described as not getting what one deserves. Everybody told them that they didn't deserve to live. Yet, the Holy Spirit convinced them otherwise. They took Jesus at his word, "*All things are possible to him who believes.*"

Seeing their faith, Jesus said, "*Go, and show yourselves to the priests.*" They did what he said; they obeyed him. As they went, the blessing came—they were cleansed. What a tremendous experience! **Faith-filled obedience goes**

before God's gift. The ten lepers went "as if" they had already received God's gift of healing. **Their "as if" faith facilitated God's miracle.**

Jesus was their only hope. Their hope was not in a new program, or a new strategy, or a special event. Everything came down to their encounter with Him. When we place our hope in Jesus, He proves himself as more than enough. His compassionate mercy called them to action, to present themselves to the priests so that they could rejoin their families and friends. Faith always calls for action.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us this morning. He's awakening faith in us to call out to Jesus. We cry out, "Jesus, Master, show me a miracle! Jesus, Master, show me a sign! Jesus, Master, display your power! Jesus, Master, reveal your peace in the midst of the storm! Jesus, Master, show me your path. With prayers answered we're called to respond. They all were healed, but only one shows us how to completely respond. Let's look at his example on how we can respond to God's activity?

First, we see that God completes His activity when we give thanks.

There were ten lepers. They all asked Jesus for healing, and they were all healed. But there was a key difference in one of them. Nine of them received healing and went their way. Only one took the trouble to come back and say "thank you."

Some scholars wonder if the other nine were either waiting to see if the cure was real or if it would last. Perhaps they thought they would run into Jesus later.

Maybe one thought that he never had leprosy in the first place. Another may have thought it was the priest, the hired holy man, who performed the miracle. We really don't know there reasons. However we do know that one returned to say, "Thanks."

I see tears running down our Lord's cheeks. He's disappointed that nine choose not to come back with gratitude. The others must have attended worship at the temple. The one who returned was a Samaritan. He was not among the Chosen ones. He was an outsider. The one who was unfamiliar with religious ways was the most grateful. The one who realized the cured worshipped much.

Second, we give thanks in worship and generosity. We could have done something else this morning, but we came to church to say "thank you." We come to say thank you God.

We worship God by expressing our gratitude. For what are we grateful? For what can we thank God? We can thank him for life and health. We can thank him for family, for spouses, parents and children, especially grandchildren. Of course we must thank him for our salvation and our security in Christ. We should thank him for our church family.

If you are having difficulty with worship, just stop. Consider all the blessings that God has given you. Then, in detail, thank him !

The Bible portrays thankfulness as an act of worship. When we are happy, we are to thank God. Deuteronomy 8:10 says, *“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which he has given you.”*

When we are at peace, we are to thank God. Colossians 3:15 says, *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”*

When circumstances are difficult, we are to thank God. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, *“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

When we are worried, we are to thank God. Philippians 4:6 says, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”*

Let’s take a few moments this morning to worship God through thanksgiving. I want some of you to shout out your completion of this sentence, “Lord I worship you because I am thankful for _____.”

Finally, we give thanks for the greater gift. The leper received a physical blessing the first time, but when he came back the second time, he received an even greater gift. Jesus said to him, *“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”* The man learned that spiritual gifts are a greater work of grace than physical grace.

Some have a difficult time believing that. But those who do, know that physical blessings don't make us happy. Joy comes from a grateful heart.

One day a nurse was helping a 14 year old amputee patient with a whirlpool treatment. She had learned that this girl had lost her leg below the knee as a result of an accident. I can't imagine what it would this girl was going through, knowing that she would dance at her wedding with an artificial leg. Through some casual conversation the nurse learned that this girl was a follower of Jesus. When she lifted her freshly amputated leg up above the bubbling water she said to the nurse, "Look at how much I have left!"

She excitedly told the nurse that since the doctors were able to amputate below the knee, it was much easier to fit prosthesis. She was anxious to get it fitted so that she could move on with life. The nurse's mind though stayed fixed on what she said, "Look how much I have left!" Her gratitude seemed really genuine. It wasn't denial or a Pollyanna mentality. She knew she was missing a good part of her leg, and she wouldn't have chosen that. But she was so very thankful for this bit of good news.

The Bible says, *"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God."* (Hebrews 12:28) Our gratitude, our thankfulness, is a way in which we worship God. We can sing, and that is worship. We can say thank you, and that is worship. We can give generously and that is

worship. I am moved by the gratitude of this 14-year-old girl. I am moved to worship with a grateful heart.

Thanksgiving looks back on the blessings received. Thanksgiving looks forward to greater gifts yet to be received. On this Thanksgiving holiday, remember God's gifts. Give thanks and remember "your faith has made you well."