

This is a touching and familiar story in the life of Jesus. It is one we can all relate to, for surely we know the meaning of gratitude and the joy of "Thanking our God." But there is a deeper part to this story that cannot be overlooked.

This story is especially important on this day of baptism. This was a heartfelt response of the leper who returned to thank Jesus. When he was cleansed and made whole, he is like us. This story can teach us of the vital part of our spiritual lives when we are genuinely thankful. After all, it is the season of the harvest gathering when thanksgiving is a national pastime!

So what does this say to you? That we should learn to say, *"Please and thank you!"* especially to God? Not a bad start. What does it say to these new Christians? That is what we can learn today, to discover how important for us to acknowledge God's place in our lives and really worship God in Jesus Christ!

First and foremost, Jesus' touch of healing tells us something we are all dying to hear, that **God knows our greatest needs and cares enough to touch us and make us whole!** Do you believe that with all your heart? To be a grateful Christian is to start each day trusting Him with that powerful truth.

These new Christians must hear that from us today, and they must hear from us how we start every day with Jesus, and how it becomes sweeter than the day before! But if your family is anything like mine, the biggest day of the year for offering our thanks to God mostly stirs up thoughts of turkey and dressing, giblet gravy and football games, cranberries and cousins, and the beginning of our plans for December's big gift giving and getting spree! We know there is more to Thanksgiving, something more lasting.

This story tells us a great truth about worship, it is the heart of a thriving Christian life! The point is that.....

..... *feeling grateful* is not the same as 'giving thanks;'

..... *Experiencing grace* is not the same as expressing grace;

..... *Knowing that Christ has blessed you* is not the same as praising and thanking Him for it; and

..... knowing He has saved you is not the same as returning to acknowledge Him as **Lord of your life**.

All 10 lepers experienced the healing love of Jesus;

...all 10 felt wonderfully good, liberated from their enslavement to misery and suffering;

...all 10 felt thankful....but only one took the time to return thanks. This was no small matter for any of them. They were all changed and set free, but 9 were caught up in their own new feelings, their excitement.

This last one was just as thrilled and amazed, but he stopped thinking of himself and turning to God, he said, *"You did this, Lord. I now see who you are, how you love and care for us, how you always hold all things in your hands, how you want me to live free and whole! How you powerfully touch my life in so many unseen ways to make me whole!*

..... ***I WORSHIP YOU, LORD, AND YOU ALONE.***"

Second, what caused the healed man to return to Jesus is not just that as he was healed. He realized he had seen God!

Jesus had revealed the Living God to him! As he realized he was touched and healed by God, he wanted nothing more than to return and offer his thanks to God through Jesus!

This is what worship is, genuine thanks to God, offered because of WHO God is and WHAT God has done for us. Let me ask each one of you, Did you come with that purpose on your mind today? Did you come to see and meet with the Lord of all creation, to

bow at the feet of the one who gave his life for your salvation, the one who made you whole? To thank Him again and again for all you have been given and for so much that you still only hope for in a future day? That was the spirit of this returning leper! And that is worshipping the Lord.

Now to these new Christians, I am afraid we may have to say, "Do as I say, not as I do!" REAL WORSHIP in our hearts gets to be something we take for granted, something routine. Even though it is so precious to our Lord, it gets pushed to the back burner of 'when I get around to it!' We get to be so busy, like the other 9 lepers who met God in Jesus.

"Where are the other 9," Jesus asked him. "Never mind," he might have said. " Hopefully they will find time to turn and claim my Lordship in their lives, too. But for you, this great discovery of a lifetime is yours- that **IT IS SIMPLY YOUR FAITH THAT HAS WROUGHT THIS MIRACLE OF HEALING IN YOU. GO AND LIVE** in faith and THIS TRUTH will keep you FREE FOR A LIFETIME!

Young Christians, hear this truth proclaimed to you this day..... "it is your faith that overcomes the world!" And this is the gift of God through His Son Jesus Christ. Draw close to him in real worship. Never let Sundays become routine. Draw close both in **personal**, private devotions... AND HERE, in the **congregation** of God, in the fellowship of those who love him at your church home!

Next Thanksgiving, we shall gather here and you will celebrate this day of being a Christian for one year. The Lord will be here to meet you again. You can return and say, "You did this, Lord! You are my Lord! I worship you!"

The praises will be a great thrill to all of us, but mostly to our God. As the Psalmist proclaimed. *"The Lord inhabits the praises of His people!"* He will be here as we return to praise and thank Him again for the eternal change Christ has made in you this day! That will always be a great joy, when we gather to praise Him together for the great things He has done!

END

Final Draft, 1049 words