

The Thankful Church

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Luke 17:11–19

Preparing to Pray Psalm 107

Before we go any further, I want you to have your hymn book out, the blue hymnal, and open it to page 342. Those are the little numbers at the bottom of the page in the front part of the hymnal. 342, where you will find Psalm 107. For a few moments, you can just leave your books on the bench beside you, or have your finger in it as you fold it on your lap, but in a few moments we are going to have that in front of you.

Not Scolding, but Thanksgiving Created

Now, my dearly beloved brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, many of us are familiar with the gospel reading for this day, frequently used as the text for Thanksgiving Day. The intention of the sermon this morning is to preach to you today, for you to be and to continue to live as the thankful church. The intention of this sermon is not going to be to join that theme which we use so often to scold ourselves. Yes, we say we should be more thankful. We often ask God for things when we are in trouble, so we seldom remember to give thanks. Such scolding may be true, but it does not create thanksgiving or nurture it or sustain it.

And the intention of this sermon this morning is that thanksgiving be created and stirred up in our hearts, that it be nurtured in us, and it be sustained in us, so that the words of our blessed Lord to this Samaritan who was healed, “Go your way. Your faith has saved you,” because you too are the thankful church. You will go your way. Go home now. Go to work. This time here is limited, but your faith has saved you, so that with the Samaritan you will be that strange people in the world, falling down at Jesus’ feet, praising Him, and with a loud voice giving thanksgiving.

Our Misery: Sin Is More Than Leprosy

Thanksgiving always begins with our seeing clearly the mercy of God in our miserable condition. Being a sinner is more than leprosy, much more. Although leprosy in Jesus’ time

was a good illustration of sin, of what in the body is done as a picture of that dread disease of the soul, leprosy isolated people. They had to be separated from family, congregation, community, and work. Leprosy made social intercourse impossible. They could not participate in the life of the people, even though the lepers lived together. All they had in common was their decaying bodies, their foul smell, and death. That's what they had in common. Hardly something that joins you together.

Thanksgiving then sees what the misery is, and thanksgiving is born, fed, and sustained by preaching, hearing, saying, seeing, eating, and drinking the mighty words of the mighty acts of God's mercy toward us.

The Enemies of Thanksgiving: Deafness of Heart and Presumption

The enemies of thanksgiving then start with deafness of the heart. The heart cannot hear in faith the good mercy of God in place. What it hears is its own gall, its bitter envy, its anger. Why are they happy? Why have they got that? Why haven't I got that? How come I'm the one who's sick? How come I'm poor? Where's my father? Where's my mother? It's always full of [unclear] juices.

But furthermore, thanksgiving has another powerful enemy. It is presumption. "I have a right to something better." That gives me a right to steal, or to lie, or to cheat.

The Ten Lepers

The 10 lepers cried for mercy. Theirs was a miserable lot, and they made a good beginning. They cried to Jesus. They went to the place for help. Jesus told them a simple word that really probably made very little sense to them, except insofar as they were Jews. "Go show yourselves to the priest."

He didn't kneel down and pray. He didn't say, "Abracadabra—now watch the leprosy go away." He didn't say, "Rub it with salve and it will be gone." He just said, "Go show yourselves to the priest," and they did what they were told. That's a good first step. But on the way to the priest, they were cleansed, healed of leprosy.

It seems that nine of them were Jews. As Jews, they presumed they had a right: "We are Jews. We are Jews. We are Abraham's descendants. We know the Bible. We've got the worship. We've got the temple." [unclear]

Presumption kills thanksgiving. For thanksgiving grows in the heart of that stranger. That's the narrative.

The One Stranger Who Returned

The other nine all shared the goodness of God, like the millions of people around us. We wake up in the morning and the sun is shining. We've slept all night. We've had oxygen. We've got friends and family around us. We've got a place to work, a place to live, a fan to cool us if it's hot, and a heater to heat us if it's cold.

But this one stranger listened in a different way. He had no presumption. He was an outsider. Leprosy was a parable of his existence. He belonged to nobody, nowhere except to death and decay. But when he saw that he was cleansed, he came back and fell at Jesus' feet with a loud voice. He worshiped Jesus and gave thanks to God.

Leprosy not only isolated and made the body decay and brought death. Leprosy made the voice grotesque. So here, in the healing of the lepers, we lepers have, especially in the Samaritan, the parable of the thankful church. Our body infirmities are not the preeminent problem, although death is at work in us. But our lives, our souls are healed, and our voices are restored to praise God.

No Thanksgiving without Faith

The Samaritan heard the word of mercy in faith. All ten were cleansed, but of this one, Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you." Body cleansing is not identical to the soul's salvation. Where there is no faith, therefore there can be no thanksgiving.

That is why Holy Church is the only people in the world who truly give thanks, because she is the people of faith. Millions of Americans and millions in the world today share in the goodness and generosity of God, but where faith is absent, so is thanksgiving. And you could teach a dog to jump through a burning hoop and say "Thank you, thank you, thank you," or you can say, "If I give thanks and people will like me better, then they'll give me more, so I'm going to be courteous if they give thanks." That's not thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is the preaching and the praising of God for His mercy. And you, as faithful church, live in a world of great misery that you might be praising God and thanking Him with a healed voice as well as a healed soul and body. The misery that we live in means

particularly that you who have been bought at such great price—the word for that is redeemed—and you who have been loved with such steadfast love—that means that His mercy is everlasting.

You are placed into that world of misery to be the thankful church, you learn by listening to the words of this merciful God about His mighty works on our behalf, and you learn to listen with wisdom. You learn to give thanks, so that the Lord God says to you, as to the stranger Samaritan, “Go, go home. Your faith has saved you.”

Holy Church: A Praising and Preaching Church

Holy Church then is a praising and a preaching church. She is a learning and a singing church. She says the works of God’s words to the people in the world of their misery.

We’re now going to spend a little time learning that by a study and singing and praying of Psalm 107. You can open your books now to page 342. Together we will learn from this psalm to meditate on the mercy of God, to marvel, to glorify the goodness of God, to praise the wonderful works of God, to marvel at the wisdom with which God works, and all day long to offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving.

The words “Go your way; your faith has made you whole” are words [unclear] addressed to us today, or in the words of the Psalm, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”

We will consider the various kinds of mercy in which the various kinds of misery in which we are trapped, and how we are to call upon God and to say so about His great redemption. “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the foe.”

The First Marvel: God Gathers His Church

This is the first marvel. God has gathered you together to be His holy church from all corners of the earth. He has gathered us.

Let us pray Psalm 107:1 through 3. Our pattern will be: the Cantor will sing the beginning verse, and we will follow and alternate verse by verse.

[Psalm 107:1–3 is prayed, cantor and congregation alternating verse by verse. The recording of the singing is unclear.]

The Second Marvel: Wanderers Led to a City

Marvel number two. Some of the misery in the world we know is the misery of the wanderer. As I told you last Sunday, Cain had no place to live. He dwelt east of Nod, east of Eden, in the land of Nod, wandering around, enemy to everybody, and everybody an enemy to him.

Like the lepers, these people in our time are cut off from all ties. They really don't know much about their own family, many of them, about their fathers or their mothers, or their ancestors, their lives ebb away as they are craving always for something, and always ending up empty. These are the people around us. It says in the psalm, they cried to the Lord, and He led them into a city, a city in which they could live.

The city is interdependent. You need the sewer man more than the sewer man needs you, but he also needs you to teach his children in school. We all need each other.

The city that we are led to is the one that has the perfect mayor, our Lord Jesus Christ. This city is His holy church. There the Lord gives His life, and He gives us to each other. He brings us to a city where we may dwell, and He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

Let us now pray Psalm 107:4 through 9.

[unclear] He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

There you live, my beloved. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

The Third Marvel: Chained to Death, Set Free

Marvel number three: Leprosy is like being chained to death. The body loses its senses. The man can be smoking a cigarette and burn his finger and not even feel it. It rots away, and he simply is chained to it. That sense of leprosy is a good picture of sin. It is slavery that ends in death.

Last week we heard in Saint Paul, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death to which I am chained?" And he says, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Sin is slavery. It is slavery because it is rebellion against the Word of God. Sin despises God's will and ways. I don't mean it burns Bibles. It just simply sleeps through the study. It will ignore any learning. Doesn't despise by saying Bible's no good. It despises by not using. That's what sin [unclear], and so this slavery is bitter.

The psalm tells us what we know, and the politicians are telling us we're working harder and harder, and we can't save anything. Less and less are we able to save. We scrimp and worry, and we can't get ahead. We struggle and quarrel, and we stumble around in darkness. Everybody has a solution: pay more taxes, pay no taxes, don't do this, buy that, take them away from the food, take the food from them. Everybody stumbles around in the dark, and everybody says, "Come my way, I'll help you out."

So this slavery is full of bitterness. It embitters our work. People can work. They think only to retire, so they can have fun, or they work at jobs that they think are boring, are bored to death. But these people, in the misery of the world, is where we live.

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say this, whom He has redeemed." They cried to the Lord, and the Lord delivered them. He broke the bonds of the bronze gate. Bronze was the hardest metal they knew, and he cut the bars of iron that had locked them into their own slave pit.

He gives his word of absolution to us right here, truly the gate of heaven, right here. The face of the Lord pronounces that cleansing, that freedom that has freed [unclear] to live for and with and among each other.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for His wonderful deed, praying verses 10 through 16.

For they have rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonders. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

The Fourth Marvel: Folly, Shame, and Boredom

For rebellion against God is folly. We are a world filled with foolishness, and it makes our misery widespread. Of the consequences of folly, shame and boredom are among the heaviest to bear. Shame makes us liars. We put on our fig leaves to deceive ourselves and others. Shame makes us angry.

Why were we such fools to [unclear]? And boredom leaves us stale and dead; life becomes so boring as it is in our time. Millions of dollars are spent just to buy the trinkets of entertainment, to buy fishing rods and guns and boats and snowmobiles and little toys, Nintendos, and games. In 10 minutes, they are boring. There's got to be something more violent, something more outrageous.

The evidence of this stale, hopeless life is so abundant. We live in it. We live in that world.

And what happens to us is that the phrase "we are born to death" describes even our children. My grandbabies at four are saying, "[unclear], I'm so bored. What shall I do?" Four years old. We have talked well.

Now into this misery comes the mighty and merciful Lord. He builds a ladder, a staircase from heaven to earth. The name of that staircase is Jesus Christ, our Lord. And the mighty and merciful God on that ladder comes to the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve to take us into life, real life, life abundant. In that bridge, God has made a way to bring heaven to earth and to take us into heaven. Truly, this is the house of God.

Now you are the redeemed. You have heard this with faith. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

Be wise and listen to Him, and then say Psalm 107 verses 17 through 22.

[unclear] the gates of death. He sent forth His word and healed them and rescued them from the grave. Let them sacrifice [unclear].

But not everybody is weak and in trouble among us. There are doers and shakers, but they sometimes also are shaken, and then they are delivered from their wit's end.

The Fifth Marvel: The Mighty at Their Wit's End

Marvel number five:

the mighty men of the world. We are trying with might and main to raise taxes, lower taxes, make more money, and to do now the unbelievably incredible thing: grow the economy as it starts, and everyone wants to promise to us that we will have the dream come true, and that it will get better and better every day in every way. And there are mighty men in the world, heroes, men and women of great accomplishment, daring, courageous, intelligent. They explore space and the depths of the sea, they dig in the psyche until they get down to its muck,

and they can operate on the eye and make it function again. And they develop businesses and civilizations and highways of super knowledge, intricate beyond all telling.

And then the mighty power of God, one hurricane, one volcanic eruption, one tornado, one earthquake can leave us at our wit's end. And if it isn't that kind of mighty power, it is we at our wit's end. How are we going to solve the trouble, the issues of disintegrating families, schools that can't seem to accomplish their jobs. We are at wit's end. Then they cried to the Lord, and He quieted everything down.

You live in that turbulent world. Some of you are shakers and doers. Some of you are the ones who are solving problems, and in that world we live as the thankful church.

The mighty ones are led from their isolated heroic singleness into the congregation to exalt the name of God to the company of the righteous. Some of you are those people here and there in the council of the elders, you learn the word of God and you teach them wisdom. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed with His outstretched arms."

Now we're going to sing 107:22 through 32.

They saw the works of the Lord, His wonderful deeds in the deep. [unclear] went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. They were glad when it grew calm, and He guided them to their desired haven. Let them exalt Him in the assembly of the people and praise Him in the council of the elders.

The Sixth Marvel: God Works as God

Marvel number six: God does not work the way we think. God works as God. So where there is no faith, there is no thanksgiving, for faith receives the salvation that God works in the way that God works it.

He saves us from our death by the death of His innocent Son. That seems [unclear] to us.

[unclear] There He brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. He blessed them, and their numbers [unclear]. [unclear] The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked [unclear].

Why? Well, then listen, listen and consider and give thanks.

The Seventh Marvel: The Wise Who Give Thanks

This is marvel number seven. You are the wise ones. They are the ones who listen to that word, that mighty word of the merciful God, and listen in faith. That is what makes us wiser than all the weakness of the world.

Were they wise who never returned to give thanks? No, they were foolish. Where are the wise? These are the faithful who bow down at His feet and with a loud voice give Him thanks. It is you He has placed into this world for your time yet, His thankful church.

Well, then I say to you, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”

Now we pray Psalm 107, verse 43.

*Together: “Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord.”
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever.*

The peace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you.

SOURCE

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Transcribed from an audio recording of a sermon by Kenneth F. Korby (CTSF Media). [unclear] marks words that could not be made out.