

CHAPTERS 16 AND 17 IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE ARE LOADED WITH DIFFICULT AND SOMETIMES CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGES. THE COMMENDATION OF A DISHONEST MANAGER, THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, THE ISSUE OF REMARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE, AND THE DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN AND HELL ARE POTENTIALLY CONFUSING OR SENSITIVE TOPICS, BUT A VERY SIMPLE IDEAL RUNS THROUGH EACH ONE.

SELFISHNESS OR SERVITUDE? THAT QUESTION RESTS AT THE HEART OF THESE TWO CHAPTERS. THE DISHONEST MANAGER REDEEMED HIMSELF NOT BY TRICKERY BUT BY GENEROSITY (16:8). MEN AND WOMEN WERE FORSAKING THEIR VOWS TO GOD TO PURSUE THEIR OWN LUSTFUL URGES (16:18). THE TWELVE WANTED GREATER FAITH WHEN THEY SHOULD HAVE GRATEFULLY RECOGNIZED WHAT THEY HAD (17:6, 10). THE THANKLESS LEPERS AND THE FOOLS WHO IGNORED THE COMING JUDGMENT ALL SERVED THEIR OWN DESIRES.

THE ACCOUNT OF THE TEN LEPERS IN CHAPTER 17, VERSES 11 THROUGH 19, CAN, AT FIRST PASS, CAST JESUS INTO THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE, WHINEY FIGURE WHO NOTICES MORE THOSE WHO DIDN'T RETURN IN GRATITUDE THAN THE ONE WHO DID. HOWEVER, UPON FURTHER STUDY, THE STORY OPENS A WEALTH OF INSIGHT INTO GRATITUDE AS A PATH TO WHOLENESS. THE STORY SEEMS TO BE TOLD, NOT ONLY AS ONE OF JESUS'S MIRACLES, BUT TO SHOW THAT HE GLADLY USED HIS POWER TO HEAL FOR THOSE WHO WOULD NOT EVEN THANK HIM FOR IT. THIS ILLUSTRATES AND DEMONSTRATES THE KINDLY UNRESENTFUL HEART WHICH HE HAD JUST BEEN TALKING ABOUT. ALSO, IT SHOWS THE SAMARITAN IN A GOOD LIGHT COMPARED TO THOSE OF JESUS' OWN RACE. THOSE NINE JEWISH LEPERS MUST SURELY HAVE BEEN HARDENED CHARACTERS TO NOT EVEN THANK JESUS.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, OUR CHURCH DELIVERED CHRISTMAS BUNDLES TO NEEDY FAMILIES IN THE AREA. THE SCHOOL NURSE PROVIDED THE INFORMATION, WHICH WAS KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. THE INFORMATION INCLUDED THE AGES OF THE CHILDREN, SO THAT CLOTHING AND TOYS COULD BE INCLUDED. EACH BUNDLE INCLUDED A FROZEN TURKEY AND OTHER FOODSTUFFS. WHEN THE ASSIGNMENTS WERE HANDED OUT, ONE OF OUR GROUP EXPLODED WHEN ONE FAMILY NAME WAS ANNOUNCED. SPEAKING OF THE FATHER, HE SAID, "HE MAKES MORE MONEY THAN I



DO!" BEULAH SAID, "WILLARD, THIS IS FOR THE CHILDREN." WILLARD CALMED RIGHT DOWN, BECAUSE HE REALIZED THAT THE CHILDREN WERE IN REAL NEED.

MAKING THE DELIVERIES WAS AN INTERESTING EXPERIENCE FOR ME. AT ONE HOUSE, THE MOTHER CALMLY SAID, "PUT IT OVER THERE." I THOUGHT PERHAPS THAT SHE WAS EMBARRASSED, UNTIL, AS WE WERE LEAVING, SHE SAID, "WE'LL BE HERE NEXT YEAR." AND SHE NEVER EVEN SAID "THANK YOU."

AT ANOTHER HOME, WE WERE WARMLY WELCOMED, WITH JOY AND EXCITEMENT. THE MOTHER SAID, "I GUESS WE'LL HAVE A CHRISTMAS AFTER ALL." THE CHILDREN WERE SO EXCITED, THEY WERE JUMPING UP AND DOWN. AS WE LEFT, THE MOTHER, WITH TEARS OF JOY, COULDN'T THANK US ENOUGH. WE WERE AFFECTED, AND WE SHARED IN HER JOY. SHE MADE THAT A GREAT CHRISTMAS FOR US.

I'M CERTAIN THAT YOU HAVE HAD SIMILAR EXPERIENCES IN YOUR OUTREACH PROGRAMS HERE.

"MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE TO GOD, ALL THE EARTH; SING THE GLORY OF HIS NAME; GIVE TO HIM GLORIOUS PRAISE. SAY TO GOD, 'HOW AWESOME ARE YOUR DEEDS!'" (PS 66:1-3a). THE PSALMS OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING PUT INTO WORDS A LIFESTYLE OF GREAT JOY. DON'T YOU WISH YOU COULD GO THROUGH LIFE FEELING LIKE THAT? YOU CAN. GOD GIVES US MANY GOOD GIFTS. WE RECEIVE MOST OF THEM GLADLY. BUT THE BEST GIFT OF ALL OFTEN GOES UNCLAIMED. IT IS THE GIFT OF GRATITUDE.

A STORY OF TWO GIFTS: AS JESUS WAS TRAVELING, TEN LEPERS CAME OUT TO MEET HIM AND ASKED TO BE HEALED. LEPROSY WAS A TERRIBLE, HORRIFIC AND VERY MUCH FEARED DISEASE. IT WAS NOTHING SHORT OF A LIVING DEATH. IT COULD CRIPPLE AND KILL. PEOPLE WHO HAD IT WERE OFTEN BELIEVED TO HAVE BROUGHT GOD'S JUDGEMENT UPON THEMSELVES BECAUSE OF THEIR SINS. QUARANTINE LAWS DEFINED IN SCRIPTURE REQUIRED LEPERS TO LIVE OUTSIDE OF THE COMMUNITY. THEY HAD TO STAY AT A DISTANCE FROM EVERYONE. THE LEGAL DISTANCE WAS 100 PACES. AND, AS A GRADUAL LOSS OF VOICE WAS ONE OF THE SYMPTOMS OF THE DISEASE, THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF THE TEN CALLING OUT, "JESUS, MASTER, TAKE PITY ON US!" MAY HAVE BEEN REQUIRED IN ORDER TO BE HEARD. IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE ANYTHING THAT COULD DESTROY SOMEONE'S LIFE MORE COMPLETELY THAN LEPROSY.



JESUS TOLD THEM TO GO AND SHOW THEMSELVES TO THE PRIEST. IT WAS NECESSARY FOR A LEPER TO GET A HEALING VALIDATED BY A PRIEST BEFORE HE OR SHE COULD RETURN TO THE COMMUNITY. AS THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY, THEY WERE HEALED. THEY MUST ALL HAVE BEEN GLAD. BUT ONLY ONE CHOSE TO BE GRATEFUL.

THAT ONE CAME BACK TO JESUS SHOUTING PRAISE TO GOD. HIS STRONG VOICE WAS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF HIS COMPLETE HEALING. HIS HEALING TAUGHT HIM AN ENTIRELY NEW WAY OF RELATING TO LIFE. HE REALIZED THAT HIS LIFE WAS A MIRACULOUS GIFT FROM GOD. HE LEARNED TO LIVE TRUSTING GOD AND CELEBRATING LIFE. JESUS SAID TO THAT MAN, "YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL." THE GREEK WORDS USED HERE ARE THE SAME ONES THAT ARE TRANSLATED IN OTHER PASSAGES: "YOUR FAITH HAS SAVED YOU." NINE HAD RECEIVED PHYSICAL HEALING. ONE HAD RECEIVED THE WHOLE NEW WAY OF LIVING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND WITH LIFE THAT COMES WITH SALVATION.

MANY WHO RECEIVE GOD'S BLESSINGS ONLY TAKE THEM. OTHERS ARE LED BY THEM INTO A LIFE OF BLESSEDNESS.

A REASON FOR GRATITUDE.

THERE WAS A PERSON WHO HAD JUST COME THROUGH A VERY PAINFUL AND FRIGHTENING STRUGGLE WITH A POTENTIALLY LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS. IT DISABLED HER PHYSICALLY AND, FOR A WHILE, MENTALLY, AND COULD HAVE EASILY TAKEN HER LIFE. BUT SHE GOT WELL AND RECOVERED HER ABILITY TO LIVE LIFE FULLY. NOW SOMETIMES, WHILE DOING VERY SIMPLE TASKS, SHE FINDS HERSELF THINKING, "TWO YEARS AGO I COULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS." IT MAKES HER VERY HAPPY. SHE IS GRATEFUL TO GOD FOR HER LIFE AND HEALTH. GOD IS VERY REAL TO HER. SHE ALSO FEELS A GREATER COMPASSION FOR OTHERS WHO ARE GOING THROUGH SUFFERING. THE GRATITUDE IS THE ULTIMATE GIFT THAT PULLS ALL THE OTHER GIFTS TOGETHER INTO A CHANGED LIFE.

BUT WHY AREN'T THE REST OF US JUST AS GRATEFUL? IS OUR LIFE AND HEALTH ANY LESS MIRACULOUS BECAUSE IT HAS NOT BEEN THREATENED? AS LONG AS WE LIVE, WE HAVE THE GOOD GIFT OF LIFE FROM GOD. AND WHEN WE GO TO MEET DEATH IN FAITH, WE HAVE HOPE AS A SIMILAR GIFT. WE TOO COULD BE GRATEFUL.

A GIFT WORTH HAVING. WHY SHOULD WE WANT GRATITUDE? IT CERTAINLY IS NOT IN VOGUE. GRATITUDE, AS A LIFESTYLE, IS A SPECIAL KIND OF HAPPINESS. IT IS



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HAPPINESS THAT DOES NOT DEPEND UPON ANY PRIDE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT OR  
PRETENSE OF DESERVING. IT IS A SIMPLE CELEBRATION OF LIFE. IT IS THE KIND OF  
LIFE THAT COMES FROM LIVING IN FAITH AND TRUST IN THE GRACE AND LOVE OF  
GOD. IT IS AT LEAST PART OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED.

GOD HAS GIVEN YOU MANY GIFTS. DON'T FAIL TO RECEIVE THE BEST ONE, THE GIFT  
OF GRATITUDE THAT CAN SEND YOU DOWN LIFE'S ROAD SINGING, "MAKE A JOYFUL  
NOISE TO GOD, ALL THE EARTH."

LUP. O GOD, YOU REMAIN FAITHFUL EVEN WHEN WE ARE FAITHLESS. GRANT US THE  
ENDURANCE OF YOUR STEADFAST LOVE THAT WE MAY LIVE WITH CHRIST AND JOIN  
YOUR REIGN OF GLORY, THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. RENEW YOUR  
SPIRIT IN US THAT WE MAY CLAIM OUR GIFTS AND USE THEM IN YOUR SERVICE. IN  
THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE SOURCE OF OUR  
SALVATION, WITH ETERNAL GLORY. AMEN.