
The Importance of Gratitude

DAVE BAST

How are you on gratitude? Do you find the words “thank you,” coming frequently and easily to your lips? Are you filled with a sense of wonder, even awe, at how much you have received? And really, in comparison with so many of the world’s people, which of us has not been blessed beyond measure? Do you often praise God for the many gifts he has given you? Do you try to give to others out of the abundance that you have received? Well, if you do not, maybe the story we are about to dig into today on *Groundwork* will help to change that. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; working our way through the middle section of Luke; it is sometimes called the journey section. It is set, all of it, in the context of Jesus going up to Jerusalem; really, one big journey, but Luke must have put things, and drawn things in from different places and times because a lot of it overlaps with other Gospel stuff.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Isn’t it sometimes – do I remember this right from New Testament class – called the Great Insertion because Luke inserts a huge chunk of material, which is unique to Luke, for the most part: Good Samaritan, parable of the Prodigal Son, a lot of some of most famous stuff in the Bible is only in Luke’s Gospel, not Matthew, Mark, or John; and it is all framed inside the journey that begins in Luke 9:51 when Jesus resolutely turns toward Jerusalem, and ends at the Triumphal Entry and then the final week of Jesus’ life, which is where this series will ultimately wind up as well; which is why we have made it into a Lenten series, because this is Jesus’ journey to the cross.

DAVE BAST

On the journey, as we are; yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And during Lent, we do, too.

DAVE BAST

We have had to pick and choose quite a bit because, as you point out, there is a ton of stuff here, and some of the most famous parables, certainly, that Jesus told. There is a whole chapter of them in Luke 15; we are going to skip that. Maybe we will do a series on parables one of these programs. There are other things – last week we looked at the curious story of Jesus and Beelzebub – the accusation that he was casting out demons by the power of darkness and how he responded to that.

Today, we are going to skip ahead a couple of chapters to Luke 17, and the story of – it is really about gratitude – it is the story of Jesus’ encounter with ten sufferers. They are often called the Ten Lepers; that might be a term that is somewhat harsh or a term of opprobrium today. We will just say they were sufferers from this dread disease, and how Jesus interacted with them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is Luke 17, beginning at the 11th verse: ¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance, ¹³And called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests,” and as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵And one of them, when he saw he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him, and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?” ¹⁸Has no one returned to give God praise except this foreigner?” ¹⁹And then he said to him, “Arise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Whereas, if I recall correctly, the literal translation there would be: Your faith has saved you.

DAVE BAST

Has saved you; yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So that is the story.

DAVE BAST

And it is a wonderful little vignette – it is a great story for Thanksgiving Day, actually, I guess.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I have used it for that, yes.

DAVE BAST

Right; but what strikes me first of all about the story is this mixed company of sufferers; and we are told they are suffering from leprosy. Now, that is a term that occurs a number of times in scripture, and it can mean leprosy proper, the disease in the modern world that we know as leprosy; which, thankfully, has been largely eradicated, at least in the West; but, it could also refer to a number of other, similar afflictions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It seems to have been anything – and often would show on the skin – but, it seems to be anything that people were really afraid was contagious; and maybe it was and maybe it was not, but they were afraid it was contagious, and so the best thing was quarantine. In a day when other medical treatments were not possible, the best way to cure a disease is to never get it in the first place. So, they were sequestered. It is interesting – we are told – Luke tells us we are in the borderlands with Samaria on one side and Galilee on the other, and usually that was a pretty staunch border. Samaritans and Jews, as John will remind us in John 4 when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well – John says: Jews and Samaritans; they do not associate; they do not like each other; but these men have a common problem, and a common problem sometimes leads to a community. So, they have formed a mixed community of Jews and Samaritans – Galileans and Samaritans – because misery likes company, but sometimes misery creates company, creates community. So, here they are, and they keep the law; they keep their distance. They do not run up to Jesus. They know they are not supposed to. They do not want to infect anybody else; so they respectfully, and out of health considerations, stay away, but cry out for mercy; and Jesus responds, but what he says is very interesting. He does not say he is going to heal them.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He tells them, “Go to the priests,” and what did they hear when they heard that?

DAVE BAST

Well, yes, it is as though they see him at a distance, passing by, and they realize this is maybe their only chance. They are desperate. And just as misery creates company, misery also overcomes reticence or politeness. You do not stand on ceremony when you see your last chance at life slipping away. So, they start hollering – never mind politeness – and Jesus responds as he almost always does to that cry, “have mercy;” this wonderful picture that we have here, because on a deeper level, in the New Testament, especially – leprosy – almost always behind that lies the reality of sin. It is more of a spiritual condition – we are outcasts; we are cut off; we are isolated; and we are under the sentence of death; and the only thing we have to appeal to is the mercy of God, and Jesus embodies that, so he turns, but instead of putting his hand on them, as he did in the case of a leper, famously, in Matthew’s Gospel; he reaches out and touches him; instead he just says to them, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” Now, he is invoking Old Testament law here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, and they would have heard a promise in that. To our ears, “Go show yourselves to the priests,” seems like, well, that is not what they asked for; but they would have heard: There is a promise here because if you had any contagious disease in Israel that caused you to have to live outside the camp, outside the community, if you were cured, the first step was having the priest inspect you – and the priest sort of becomes like the county health clerk or something – and the priest then says, “You are right; the disease is gone so you can move back home. You can come back to the community.” So, when he said, “Go to the priests,” they heard the promise of healing. You would only go to the priest for one reason and that is if you wanted to prove that you were healed. So, they figured something was up here, and indeed, as they go they look down, they look at their hands, they look at each other, and say, “We are clean!” Whatever was wrong with them is now gone, and they are overjoyed, but nine of them keep doing what Jesus said. They go to the priest; only one turns around to do something different.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and he is the most unlikely candidate of all; that is the kicker to the story. “Were there not ten cleansed?” Jesus says. “Where are the nine?” Good question. Where are the nine? Well, they are still going off to go back to their old life. “Hey, thanks God; You have done this wonderful thing.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

And technically, they are fulfilling the law; they are going to the priests. They are really not supposed to go back to anybody until they have seen the priest, so...

DAVE BAST

But, maybe this Samaritan did not know any better because he was kind of a half-breed and he was not a real Jew anyway.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or gratitude trumped legalism; right?

DAVE BAST

There you go.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When grace comes, the law, although not unimportant, the law takes a backseat to grace, and gratitude just busts out all over. But, he is the only one, Jesus says. So, what we want to think about next, Dave, is a little bit about what is gratitude and why is it important? Why did even Jesus seem a little wounded here that there was not more gratitude from all but one of the ten that He made well? So, we will think about the importance and the nature of gratitude in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are digging into the story of the ten sufferers with leprosy and the one – the only one, as far as we know – who turned back to Jesus to express his gratitude. Really, gratitude is the theme of this story; the importance of it; the mechanics of it. How does it happen – thanksgiving is not just a holiday in November.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or October, if you are in Canada.

DAVE BAST

Thank you, for our Canadian listeners. It is really an essential part of the Christian life, of the life of faith; and here is an example, almost a case study; a group of people, all of whom received the same thing; an incredible blessing; unexpected; impossible, in a way. They are healed. They are snatched from the jaws of death. They are taken out of a living death of leprosy, and they are restored to life; cleansed; they are saved, literally; and nine of them go their way, and as far as we know, just – “Hey, thanks;” kind of assuming that this has been given to them – and only one comes back personally to re-engage with Jesus and express his gratitude.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is interesting. You can almost hear a ring of hurt in Jesus’ words. “Where are the other nine? Were not ten healed? Is only one going to say thank you?” I wonder how often God feels that way? He probably feels that way every single day. Manifold blessings showered on the creation and the percentage of people who come back to say thank you is probably less than ten percent.

DAVE BAST

His rain [falls] on the just and the unjust, as the Bible says.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, even for God a lack of gratitude apparently widens the eyes, and it is amazing; but gratitude is so important, not only over against God, but over against each other. When somebody consistently lives without expressing gratitude, but also, when somebody consistently fails to receive gratitude from others, they wither and die.

I have loved the novels of the writer, Anne Tyler, over the years. She had a novel some years ago called *Ladder of Years*, and the chief character is a woman named Delia Grinstead. Her husband is a surgeon and she has three or four kind of galumphing sons who are teenagers, and nobody ever says thanks to her. She puts hot food on the table, she folds the laundry, she stocks the fridge. If something is missing, they will complain – if somebody did not buy more Ritz crackers, they will complain – but, nobody ever says thank you. And so, one day she just walks away and she just leaves her family, and then the police come to take a missing persons report, and they say: So, Delia, what did she look like? Oh, well, we don’t really remember. What was she wearing when last you saw her? Oh, we don’t really remember. Anne Tyler’s point was, when you are not grateful, you do not even see other people. You do not even notice them. They just fade away. They wither and die from your lack of gratitude, but you have dehumanized them by not saying thanks. It is just such a natural way to close the loop of creation; of receiving and giving thanks.

DAVE BAST

I think another thing that makes gratitude especially important is that it is part of the secret of happiness; personal happiness. You do not even have to be a Christian or a religious believer in any way, shape or form. Just imagine a person you know who is ungrateful. Is that a happy person? Chances are, no, not.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Typically kind of grumpy or snooty, but not pleasant.

DAVE BAST

And even given to envy because part of the antidote to discontent is to be thankful for what you have instead of dwelling on what you do not have.

You mentioned a novel – I happen to be reading *Robinson Crusoe*, the classic novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. You would never guess this from all of the Disney versions and whatnot, but it is actually a Christian book, and it is the story, not just of this castaway's adventures, but of his conversion. Part of what works on him is he finds a Bible in the stuff that he saves off of this wrecked ship. He is reading and he suddenly realizes, "I should not dwell on what I do not have here, but on what God has given me – what he has done for me," and so, he experiences this wonderful... That is what gratitude does, too, it delivers us from envy and from unhappiness and discontent.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it keeps us in touch with God, above all; and that is maybe part of Jesus' surprise here, too, that only one came back. So, the one who came back, the Samaritan who came back – we are told two things – he came back praising God and then he fell at Jesus' feet in gratitude. He is praising God and he is thanking Jesus. So, that connects us to God, ultimately, and then in the next segment, the final segment of this program, we will talk a little bit about having better spiritual eyesight, and so forth. But, one of the things that you sometimes see about gratitude is sometimes the people who technically – and here we are talking about the wealthy, and I guess that includes, probably, most of us over against the rest of the world – the super wealthy have more reasons to be grateful than anybody, and yet, they often are not grateful, they are entitled.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes, the least likely to be devout and faithful in giving thanks; but here we get at the heart of it, I think. I think you have put your finger on it because what it is really about is relationships; and especially a living relationship with God, with Jesus himself. It is no accident that the one who returns, the Samaritan, comes and falls at his feet. The others, maybe, are so consumed with the gift that they have been given that they never think about the one who gave it to them. And more than just giving us gifts, more even than saving us – in fact, you could say the reason he does save us is because God is interested in having a relationship with us. He does love us and he wants us to love him back, and gratitude is the breath of any living relationship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Gratitude says – and here, maybe, is why people who feel like they have earned it for themselves – sort of like Bart Simpson on the TV show, the cartoon show, *The Simpsons*, his father asked him to open with prayer one day, and he says, "Dear God, why should we thank you for this; we bought it; we used our money." So, gratitude says, by saying thank you, you are acknowledging: I do not necessarily deserve this and I am getting it as a gift; and so, saying thank you breaks you out of your own isolation.

DAVE BAST

Both of us were raised on the Heidelberg Catechism, that great compendium of the Christian faith, and teaching it and passing it on to children. It is sometimes divided into three sections: Guilt, the shortest one, thankfully, but laying out the problem; and then Grace, how God saves us; what he has done to deal with our problems, to heal us, to cleanse us, in terms of the leprosy story; but the third segment, and the longest, is often labeled just Gratitude; because the whole Christian life can be summed up in that word. The reason we do try to obey God, the reason we do try to do what we know he wants, is simply to say thank you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How can we better do that? We will think about that a bit next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are wrapping up a look, Dave, at the nature of gratitude. We have taken the story from Luke 11, where Jesus heals ten people suffering from the disease of leprosy, as it is called in the text, and only one comes back. So, even Jesus is rather startled. We were saying in the second segment that gratitude, proper gratitude, puts us in our place. It acknowledges that we do not deserve what we get; everything is from God; and so, saying thank you, expressing gratitude on a regular basis, is just acknowledging the nature of reality. God gives good gifts that we do not necessarily deserve, and so we say thank you because we did not earn it; it is not a reward; it is a gift. Life is a gift.

DAVE BAST

Right. It is the breath of any living relationship, so our relationship with God or with others, with people whom we love, with people whom we simply meet in day-to-day life, it is fed and nourished by expressing gratitude.

So, how do you say thanks? Especially, how do you say thanks to God, is the question we want to end with, and we decided to just take a little case study out of the Bible, and the best place to find those is the book of Psalms. There are so many psalms of thanksgiving, but one of the great ones, I think, is Psalm 116, which is the testimony of a person who has been saved from death. In the first part of the Psalm he talks about how he was just about a goner and he cried out to the Lord and the Lord heard him and saved him, and then he asks this great question in verse 12: What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? In other words, how can I say thanks for all of the things you have done for me, as the song goes. And he answers his own question in the next verses.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the Psalms, what we see again and again and again is – some people I suppose in our world today might call it naïve or silly – but the psalmist, including the psalmist of 116, says everything is from God, ultimately. Did you have a successful surgery? Well, it is not just the skill of the surgeon, it is a gift of God. Did something good happen to your child or did you get a promotion at work? Well, it is a gift of God. Have you got some food? It is a gift of God.

The Psalms say it is all God, so everything has to be God directed. As I breathe, I say thank you to God.

DAVE BAST

We might say that the Psalms ignore secondary causes, is maybe the technical way of putting it.

Scott Hoezee: Or say that secondary causes are God, too.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right, God working through them. Yes, it was the surgeon. Yes, it was the farmer. Yes, it was the supermarket. Yes, Bart, it was your money that bought the food, but behind all of that is the Lord.

So, how do we say thank you? What do we render to him? The psalmist, interestingly, says three different things, and he begins by saying:

¹³I will take the cup of salvation and call upon your name.

Which is to say, “I will become a real worshiper of you, God, and I will not only receive these physical blessings you have given me, but I want to make sure I take all that you have to give,” and he calls that – he symbolizes it in the cup of salvation. I cannot help but think of communion when I hear that phrase.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, the psalmist is saying: I want to take your perspective on things. I want to drink your cup. I want to see the world the way God sees it as ultimately all flowing from the goodness of God.

C. S. Lewis, when he wrote about the Psalms once said that some people are offended by that, in the Psalms, God often asks to be praised – God seems to ask to be thanked – and so, C. S. Lewis said, how is that not just a little off-putting to us? Is it arrogant of God? Is he self-centered by keeping to ask for our praise? Lewis

said, no, it is just that God is trying to overcome our shortsightedness. If a mother works herself half to death with a day job and a night job to put her son through college and he never says thanks, and in fact, squanders all of the opportunities that she gave him; if that mother comes to her son and says, “Listen, Sherman; you owe me something. You owe me some thanks.” Nobody would say, “Oh, that mother is... Why would she need to be thanked?” No, it is only fitting.

What the psalmist says is – what is thanksgiving? It is fitting, it is fittingness, because anything less is rude.

DAVE BAST

Right, and by vowing to be a worshiper of God, and by engaging in public worship – I will pay my vows to you in the presence of your people – he is just like the Samaritan who comes back to Jesus again, because – you know, let’s be honest; you may have prayed to God in a moment of desperate crisis and he came through; he delivered you, and off you went and totally forgot him when the trouble was past – there are no atheists in foxholes, the old saying goes – but when they get home from the war, plenty of people revert back to that. But this guy says, “No, I am not going to forget. I am going to continue this relationship and I am going to be a worshiper of God for life.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, ¹⁴“I will fulfill my vows to You,” and then going on in Psalm 116, verse 17: I will offer you a sacrifice to how grateful I am and I will pray.”

So, here is the psalmist saying – and I think maybe the Samaritan who was healed in Luke 17 would also say: This has changed my life. This has re-oriented my perspective, and so my worship is going to continue. I am going to sacrifice to you; I am going to pray to you – and not just today; this is not just a one-off thing – Oh, well, thank you.

It is like you are in line for lunch and you fall twenty-four cents short at the cafeteria line, and I slip you twenty-four cents, Dave, you will say, “Oh, thanks,” that is good enough. If I give you a kidney someday, Dave, I do not think that just one thanks is going to do it; and so, you are going to be saying thanks to me your whole life long; and if you know that God gave you – not just a kidney, but your whole life – well, the psalmist says: How could that not, therefore, fill your whole life with gratitude? It is only fitting.

DAVE BAST

When he says, “I am going to offer sacrifices to you,” it conjures up the whole system of the Old Testament, and it really makes for interesting reading. A lot of people skip over this part of the Old Testament, of all of these laws of sacrifice, but there was one particular sacrifice that was called a thank offering, and I think that is what this psalmist is talking about, and it was an over-and-above thing; and the thing of it is, when he made the offering – if it was an animal or something – it went to the priests; it went to other people. So, he is almost saying Woody Hayes’s famous line: You cannot pay it back; you can only pay it forward.

The gifts that we want to give to God – he does not need them – so, he tells us: you give them to someone else instead; that is how you say thanks to me, by paying forward; by being generous; by giving what I have given you and sharing it with those in need.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we always like to know how we can help you to continue digging deeper into the scriptures; so, if you visit groundworkonline.com, our website, you can tell us topics or passages you would like us to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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