

“The Right Direction” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Thanksgiving Eve November 22, 2023

- I. **Luke 17:11-19** – “¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶and he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.”
- II. **It is difficult to appreciate what we have.**
 - a. In our youth group Bible study the other night, I was trying to explain the difference between life when I was a kid and today.
 - i. Of course, we had to walk 3 miles to school in blizzards and 40 below weather in our bare feet, uphill both ways ☺ – Well, maybe it wasn’t that bad, but the conveniences we have today are wonderful.
 - ii. Looking back on my childhood, TV programs were very limited, phones were limited to homes or payphone booths, research for papers and general knowledge happened in a library as the only source of information, and heat came from coal fired furnaces.
 - iii. I specifically remember the first time I got to see cable TV, and then sometime later I used the Internet for the first time.
 1. Today, my watch probably has a more powerful computer in it than those early desktops...
 - iv. Just think, none of us carries a road atlas in our cars anymore – we have phones that get us there turn by turn... how many hours and gallons of gas did we burn driving around looking for places back in the day?
 - b. All of these things are wonderful, and I also realize that some people consider them a curse for how the world has changed, but we have to admit that these conveniences make our lives easier.
 - c. The prosperity here in America is very difficult to understand while we live in it...
 - i. For example, with less than 5% of the world’s population, we produce 25% of the entire world’s Gross Domestic Product.
 - ii. We also consume 25% of the world’s energy.
 - iii. We have a population of around 350 million people, and we consume enough food and calories on a daily basis to comfortably feed 430 million people.
 - iv. Not only that, but we throw away 200,000 tons of edible food every day – from fruits and vegetables, leftovers, and other uneaten food.¹
 - d. Statistics like these should make us all consider the abundance we have, and giving thanks to God is the least we can do.
 - e. I read a quote from one of Martin Luther’s contemporaries, John Calvin, who said, “poverty and hunger beget faith, but abundance kills it” ²
 - i. Is this a fair assumption?

1. Does faith and trust in the Lord get stronger when we have poverty and hunger?
2. Does having much, or an abundance, kill faith?

III. **Jesus is on His final journey to Jerusalem.**

- a. He has “set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) to be unjustly arrested and tried, along with being executed on a cross.
- b. However the journey also has a few Godly interruptions... or holy distractions as some would call them.
- c. As they pass by some lepers, they call out for Jesus to have mercy.
- d. In those days, leprosy was almost worse than death, because people were isolated and kept away from normal society.
 - i. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus (ch. 13-14), God commands that people with skin diseases should be put outside the camp, and if anyone comes near them, they should cry out, “unclean, unclean!”
 - ii. To be reinstated into society, they had to go to the priest at the temple, who would examine their skin, receive a sacrifice from them, and officially declare them clean.
 - iii. However, leprosy had no cure, and people who had it knew that their lives would be reduced to nothing – squalor and begging, isolation and suffering – without hope for healing.
- e. This desperation is what called out for Jesus to have mercy.
 - i. Somehow, they got word that Jesus could heal – and they cried out to get His attention when He was going by.
 - ii. They had lost everything, so they had nothing to lose by yelling for Jesus.
- f. Typically, Jews had no contact with Samaritans, but it seems that having leprosy leveled the playing field, and a Samaritan couldn't make the Jews any more unclean than they already were.
- g. So, rather than go up to them and touch them or hug them, Jesus simply tells them to go and show themselves to the priests at the temple to be examined... which implied that they would be well enough to be reinstated.
 - i. They had to take a step of faith at that very moment... do I just start walking 50 miles to the temple?
 1. They did, and they were made well along the way.
 2. We don't know how far they got, but as they were going, they were healed.
 - ii. Again, it doesn't say, but the Samaritan would have probably gone to his own temple and priests rather than Jerusalem... but somewhere inside of him, he just couldn't keep going when he saw he was healed... he returned to give thanks.
 - iii. On the other hand, the Jews kept going, probably in their excitement to get the official declaration from the priests and be restored to their homes, their families, and their lives that had been ripped away from them.

- h. Jesus calls out the lack of gratitude from the 9, while an “outsider” Samaritan came back to offer thanksgiving.
 - i. The Samaritan was given far more than healing from a horrible disease... Jesus recognized and pointed out that he had faith that made him well... a faith that means his sins are forgiven and that he is a child of God.
 - ii. Once the Jews were healed and their abundance restored, they kept going in the wrong direction – away from Jesus.

IV. **The temple was not the way, Jesus is the way.**

- a. The temple was once the main place to give thanks and sacrifices to God – but as Jesus came into the world, He was the place to worship the one true God.
- b. The Jews who kept going toward the temple were not recognizing the truth that was there in the Man, Jesus Christ... who was and is also true God.
- c. Jesus is the only way to eternal life and forgiveness – and sadly, when people have it good, they often overlook the most important thing.
 - i. When we have lots of things – lots of abundance in our lives – oftentimes we don’t go in the direction of Jesus and His forgiveness.
- d. Yet, what does the Bible say?
 - i. “Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful,” (Joel 2:13)
 - ii. In repentance and thanksgiving we come home to Jesus and thank Him for the blessings of body and soul that we have in spite of our sins and brokenness.
 - iii. If we think about it, all of us have an incurable disease – sin... a sickness that causes isolation and loss... from God and others.
 - iv. But in His great mercy, Jesus sees us and has compassion on us, healing us by His powerful word.
- e. In all of these gifts of compassion and mercy, the Lord is calling us to the right direction... coming home to Jesus.
 - i. As we give thanks for all that we are and have, we are headed in the right direction... into the arms of our Savior. Amen.

¹<https://public.wsu.edu/~mreed/380American%20Consumption.htm#:~:text=%EF%BF%BD%20Americans%20eat%20815%20billion,of%20garbage%20by%20age%2075>.

² Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Vol. 2, p. 208). Logos Bible Software.