

364 Days of Thanksgiving – Week 1

February 5, 2017

Introduction

Some things you don't see every day: an amur leopard (it's estimated that there are fewer than 60 in existence along the Russia / China border); William Shakespeare's original signature (there are only six known copies); an original Double Eagle \$20 gold coin (there's only one left in private hands).

Theme: Uncommon Mercy Leads to Uncommon Gratitude.

All those things are extremely rare. They're uncommon. For the next 3 weeks, we're going to focus on gratitude in our worship services and adult Bible classes. As we kick things off this morning, we're going to see two other things we don't see every day: uncommon mercy and uncommon gratitude. The first one leads to the other.

Our lesson today is from **Luke 17:11–19 (NIV11)** - ¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Sermon Exposition

In our lesson, we find Jesus beginning his last, long journey to Jerusalem. In just a few short weeks, a crown of thorns would be pushed down onto his head, a scourge would tear into his back, and a hammer would drive nails into his hands and feet. The condemning judgment of all the world's sin would be placed on him.

As Jesus heads south to Jerusalem, he comes to a village near the border between Galilee and Samaria. Just as he's about to enter the village, ten men suffering from leprosy call out to him from a distance.

Leprosy is uncommon today. Cases in the United States are extremely rare. Leprosy has been all but eradicated from most parts of the world; it's not something you see every day.

But in Jesus' day, it was more common. In Jesus' day, a person who suffered from leprosy would be forced to live far away from other people in what were called leper colonies. There they'd die a slow and agonizing death.

These lepers, though, had heard about Jesus. From a distance, they yell out to him. One of the first places leprosy attacks is the vocal chords, so it might've been difficult for them to yell. And yet just imagine these men with scratchy voices crying out, "**Jesus, Master, have pity on us!**"

It wouldn't be uncommon for someone today to feel sorry for those who have leprosy. Just Google it and look at the pictures. They'll break your heart, and you'll probably close the window mighty quick. In Jesus' day, some would've felt sorry for them too, but many would've simply looked down on them. The common thinking would've been: "If God struck them with leprosy, they must've done something pretty terrible to deserve it." Yet Jesus showed them mercy. In fact, he showed them uncommon mercy.

Remember, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die. The weight of the world was on his shoulders. He had very important things to do. But that didn't stop him from helping these men.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus had shown uncommon mercy to another leper. On that occasion, he actually reached out and touched the man to heal him. In those days, that was unheard of. Lepers were extremely contagious. They were considered unclean. No one would go near them, let alone touch them.

But that didn't stop Jesus. He told the ten lepers to show themselves to the priest. In those days, the priest was the one who would declare a person clean (or healthy) from leprosy. The priest would determine whether or not they were able to return to their family, worship at the temple, and rejoin life in society. On the way to the priest, Jesus miraculously healed them. He didn't just give them a few dollars as a handout or say a few sympathetic words. He changed their lives forever. He gave them a new life – a new beginning. The mercy he showed them was uncommon.

How does Jesus' mercy compare with the mercy we show today? We may feel sorry for those who suffer, but what steps do we take to alleviate their suffering? Maybe we'll send a few dollars to help those suffering from Ebola in Africa. Few of us, however, will leave our home and job and fly to Africa to volunteer to be in the middle of the action, helping change the lives of those suffering people. That kind of mercy is uncommon. Maybe we'll give a few dollars or some food to a person who's down and out, but how many of us will invite that one into our homes, provide a job, or spend a significant amount of time helping turn that person's life around? That kind of mercy is uncommon. And that is the kind of mercy Jesus showed.

Remember what Jesus was about to do. He was about to suffer the punishment, the pain, the hell we deserve for our sins. But that didn't keep him from showing great mercy. Jesus kept on loving, kept on helping, kept on giving – something we rarely do.

Sometimes, we find it hard to be generous and merciful because people often appear to be ungrateful. Maybe they even show their ingratitude by their complaining words. We sometimes feel like we're being used and taken advantage of. It's hard to help ungrateful people who complain about the gifts given to them.

The thing is, we're so often ungrateful and complaining people who deserve no gift from Jesus – not material gifts, not spiritual gifts! Jesus showed *us* the greatest act of charity ever by sacrificing everything to win for us forgiveness and heaven. He suffered the whippings and beatings and mocking. He suffered the hellish punishment of his heavenly Father for all our selfish sins that are all too common in each of us.

And how do we so often respond? Every day we fall into the same stupid and selfish sins. We seldom thank Jesus like we should. Yes, there are times we remember to say or sing a quick, "Thank you." But most of the time we take his love and mercy for granted. And then we have the gall to get upset and frustrated when he doesn't give us everything we want, when we want it. In spite of all that, our God continues to forgive us, to love us, to show us charity. That's uncommon mercy!

The rarest baseball card in the world is a 1909 Honus Wagner T206 tobacco card. Only a handful exist. In 2007, a near-mint version of the card sold for \$2.8 million. Uncommon things are often extremely valuable. The uncommon mercy of our Savior is worth more than all the rare baseball cards and coins and jewels of the world. His uncommon mercy won heaven for you. His uncommon mercy shows itself in everything you have and everything you are. We don't deserve any of it.

And that's why Jesus' uncommon mercy deserves uncommon gratitude. After Jesus told the lepers to show themselves to the priest, all ten of them left. Can't you just picture what it must've been like as the lepers went to the priest? They noticed their joints no longer hurt. Their skin cleared up. Their voices returned. They were healed. Can't you just see them pick up the pace and begin to run? But then one of them stopped in his tracks. He turned around and ran back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice. He fell at Jesus' feet and thanked him.

We aren't told anything more about the other nine. We can only assume that they too were thankful, at least to some degree. After all, they were healed from a painful, debilitating disease. Maybe some even considered going back to thank Jesus. But you can see how they could get too caught up in their homecoming celebrations and the excitement of their new lives.

How often doesn't that happen to us? For example, we see other people suffer tragedies and loss. It makes us realize how blessed we are. We think to ourselves, "As soon as I get home, I'm going to tell my children, my husband, my wife how much I love them. From now on, I am going to live each day as if it were my last."

But then a couple of hours pass. We get busy with our lives. By the time we get home, we forget to tell our family how much we love them. Nothing significantly changes.

Or sometimes we come to church, and the message of Christ's uncommon mercy moves us. We feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude to God. We may even say a prayer of thanks to him. We put a little more in the offering plate that Sunday to thank him. We think to ourselves about how we're going to change our lives – how from now on we're going to live for God. We imagine all the changes we're going to make. But then we get home and are distracted – by the TV or the lawn or work – and those feelings and thoughts quickly drift away. Nothing really changes.

Look again at the uncommon gratitude of that lone leper. He broke the law by not going immediately to the priest, but he couldn't help it. He had to go back to the source. He had to thank his Savior.

And he was a Samaritan. He wasn't even from the Jewish nation. He didn't have the benefit of growing up in the Jewish worship and temple life. But boy was he thankful! He wanted everyone to see – everyone to hear – what God had done for him.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, don't settle for the easy thank you. Don't settle for flippantly saying, "Oh, yeah, we're blessed. We have lots of things to be thankful for." That's easy to say. Show uncommon gratitude. Let it show in how you worship here at church. Let it show at home and at school and at work. Let it show as you yourself perform acts of uncommon mercy out there in the world.

In order to show this uncommon gratitude, revisit the uncommon mercy your Savior has shown you. Every moment of his life he showed love. He helped. He healed. He did that because you would so often fail to love and help and heal. In your life, he continues to show you love you don't deserve, forgiving *you*, healing *you*, helping *you* in every trouble. In response to your Savior's uncommon mercy to you, live an uncommonly grateful life. Amen.