

I CHOOSE GRATITUDE

Thanksgiving Weekend

Luke 17:11-19 // Kip Nanninga

November 25, 2018

Kip // Well, good morning. Welcome to Mission Hills. Hope you have had a great Thanksgiving. A special welcome to any guests and family that have come into Colorado. Thanks for being at Mission Hills. Show of hands, I want to know, who was out late Thursday night, early Friday morning for Black Friday -- you got those 40% off deals? Anybody? Yeah, there's a few. Okay, another show of hands here. Who fell asleep during some football game, ate way too much and woke yourself up snoring. Anybody? Thanks, ladies. Now the guys? One more show of hands, who has a tradition in your family, it's big in ours, but you go around the table and say something you were thankful for in the last year? Yeah, many of us, right?

Well, if you are like my family and extended family, there are people in our family that we enjoy being around. My wife and I enjoy being around them. It has nothing to do with Thanksgiving, but it's just that they are grateful people. They are thankful, and it's not been reduced to good manners when you were growing up, but they have a heart of being a grateful person. Then there's others, and I'm convinced that kind of everybody has a cousin Eddie, I think, probably. There are others that just seem to be critical about everything. We have family that when you have a conversation, they throw in the critical hand grenade, and it just shuts down the conversation. Critical about traffic. Critical about the weather. Critical about sports. Critical to politics. And I get all that, right? It's almost similar to the diary of a dog and diary of a cat. Let me share that with you.

Diary of dog, here we go. 8:00 AM, dog food. My favorite thing. 9:30 AM, the dog writes, a car ride, my favorite thing. I'm so thankful. 10:30 AM, got rubbed on my belly. That's so good. 1:00 PM, played in the yard, my favorite thing. So grateful. 3:00 PM, wagged my tail, my favorite thing. So thankful. 5:00 PM, milk bones. Oh, those are my favorite. 8:00 PM, watched TV. with my people. My favorite thing. 11:00 PM, I can't believe it, I get to sleep on the bed tonight. So thankful.

Now here's the diary of the cat. Day 983 of my captivity. My captors continue to taunt me with these bizarre little dangling things. They dine lavishly on fresh meat while the rest of the inmates and I are fed hash or some sort of dry nuggets. Although I make my contempt very well known to them, I nevertheless must eat something to keep up my strength. The cat's next journal entry, today, I decapitated a mouse and dropped it at their feet. I hoped this would strike fear into their hearts because it clearly demonstrates what I am capable of, however they merely made condescending comments about what a good little hunter he is.

Today I was almost successful in an attempt to wipe out one of my tormenters by weaving myself around his feet while he was walking. I must try this again tomorrow but at the top of the stairs. The dog receives special privileges which I just don't understand. He is regularly released and seems to be more than willing to return. He is obviously, not very smart. The bird, though, the bird has to be an informant. I observe him communicate with the guards regularly, and I'm certain he reports my every move. My captors have arranged protective custody for him in an elevated cell, so he is safe -- for now.

It's a funny story, but it seems we can easily fall into the same trap. We can easily -- especially this time of year, a sense of entitlement versus a heart of gratitude. When we remember that God creates moments in our life to get our attention about what's most important, we can choose a life of gratitude. We can choose a life of thankfulness. Now, I would like to think that I'm a grateful person. I would like to think that I'm thankful, but there have been moments in my life that just by nature, I'm not a grateful person. I can be very unthankful. I can get so impatient that I miss and skip over the grateful moments, the small moments that God has orchestrated in my life. Because, I think like many in this room, I want things better. I want things bigger. I want things faster. I want things newer, and I want them now, and when those moments happen, gratitude can slip right through our hands.

But the Bible talks about over and over, when we exhibit a life of gratitude, when we turn our attention to being grateful people, it unlocks something in our life. The Bible says it unlocks encouragement. It unlocks authentic humility. It unlocks generosity. It unlocks health, the Psalmist says. And most important, it unlocks a heart of thankfulness. You see, when I choose gratitude, it repositions my heart. It repositions my heart to the direction of God's will for my life, to the direction of God's plan for my life. Let's pray.

Father, I thank You this morning. God, we are grateful for You. We are grateful that 2,000 years ago, You stepped into planet Earth, and You were born in a low manager out with the livestock, to set us free from sin, to set us free from being bound to things that hold us up. So Father, today we are here as grateful people being reminded that it's not just about Thanksgiving, but it's a life of thankfulness. Remind us. Tap us on

the shoulder again about those things today. We ask this God, in Your name. Amen. Take your Bible and turn to Luke 17. If you don't have a Bible, there's one right in front of you, or take your smart phone and turn to Luke 17. This is a great reminder of gratitude. We are looking at nine verses that ten men have an encounter with Jesus, and tragedy happens in this story. There is great tension in this story because it's a lack of gratitude.

So as Jesus is kind of making his final farewell tour one last time around the Middle East, around the sea of Galilee, he's moving in toward Jerusalem, toward the city of Jerusalem, and as he's on the outskirts of Jerusalem, he's come off of the Damascus Highway, and if you can picture this, the Damascus Highway led around Jerusalem down by the Sea of Galilee, and it was kind of the main social media of that time. If you wanted to know anything, if you wanted to find out anything, you would ask people that travel on that Damascus Highway because they would hear about the news from different city and different towns and that news would spread, so it's not by chance that these ten men are out.

They come out of the village to meet Jesus and the travelers that are with him, and they hear about this news that here is a man that claims to be the Son of God. Not only does he claim to be the Son of God, the Messiah that will come and free the Jewish Nation from captivity or under Roman bondage from the Roman government, but he can perform miracles. He's a guy that can touch people and they are healed. He's a guy that doesn't even have to touch them physically. From a distance, people can be healed, so look what happen in verse 11.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. It's important that you understand those two regions, Samaria and Galilee. We'll get into that in a minute, the tension of this story created by Luke telling us that Jesus is traveling between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had Leprosy met him. There are five words that you need to read next that you need to underline or highlight on your smartphone because that is the tension of this story. That brings about the whole idea of the whole story that takes place. Those five words were so important. It says this, they stood at a distance. They stood at a distance, and they called out in a loud voice, Jesus, Master, would you have pity on us? In the original text what those men are saying, Rabbi, would you please just hear us out?

Would you please hear our story? Would you please just understand for a moment the pain and the struggle that we have gone through? And they stood at a distance the Bible says. These men are crying out from the depth of their heart because they know they have a disease that they woke up one morning and was found on their skin, and that disease will ultimately take their life over the course of the next few weeks, the next few months, the next few years. It's a slow death, and they'll essentially just be rotting away. The Bible tells us in Leviticus 13, if you had a disease, if you were unclean, pronounced unclean, or had Leprosy, you were instantly pulled from your community. You were instantly taken out of your house. Many leper colonies were on islands way away from normal-ness of life, or they were put in a cavernous area where no one would live and literally left to rot, and the only community was other people that had Leprosy and they were left alone to take care of them themselves in a leper colony.

You can imagine these men haven't touched anybody, haven't had a hug in years, haven't maybe seen their family in months or years, haven't had their kids run into their arms. Leviticus tells us that there is law, if you had Leprosy, you had to do specific things. First of all, you had to tear your clothes so people could see from a distance that something was wrong with you. Torn clothes was a significant of someone that was unclean or someone that had a disease, and you needed to stay away from them. The second thing was that they had to cover their mouths so as not to affect anyone. They had to keep their hair unkept, and anyone they close to, they had to yell out, "we are unclean. Don't come near us. We are unclean. Don't come near us!"

This leper, these lepers would have all of the social rejection of loneliness, depression, no one close, and so you realize how hopeless they became. But then they spot Jesus, and they became hopeful. From the depths of their heart, they plead with Jesus, Jesus, please, please have mercy on us. I want to stop right here, and I want to ask you a hard question. Who in your life has Leprosy? Who in your life are you keeping at a distance because they don't act like you, and they don't look like you, and they don't believe the same things you believe? Their lifestyle is far different from maybe what God's word says. Maybe financially. Maybe their belief system, maybe politically. Maybe their faith is totally different than your faith. You are keeping them at a distance because they don't do the things you do. They don't look like you. They don't vote like you. They don't live like you.

It's better to keep them at a distance, but maybe -- just maybe, before they ever trust Christ, they first have to trust Christian, and you're that Christian. You are that one that claims to be a follower of Jesus, but yet you are keeping them at a distance. Verse 14, this is the fascinating thing about Jesus. Verse 14, look what Jesus says. When he saw them, he says, go, show yourself to the priests. That was from the Levitical law, from the Old Testament that you essentially had to get a clean bill of health. So what you did, if you were clean, or felt like you were healed or you took the right medicine and you were healed, you had to go back to the temple courts, and the priest then would write you a bill of health, so if you came upon a crowd or tried to head back home, and someone said, hey, aren't you that guy that has this disease? You could pull that bill of health out from the priest and say, here he signed it. I can go home.

So Jesus is following the Law. He says, here's what I want you to do. I want you to turn and go back to the priest and get a clean bill of health. Here's what's amazing. The minute their feet pivot and turn back, look what the Bible says. As they went, they were cleansed. This is so pivotal in this story, and it's so pivotal for us in 2018. Why would Jesus say this? He was fulfilling the Law. He was doing what the Law said in the Old Testament, but I believe he did this to show you and I we have a choice to obey him. When we are obedient and following Jesus, supernatural things happen in our life and healing occurred after they obeyed his direction. You see, when we choose to respond to God and gratitude is not a

decision of the will, but it's a reflex of our heart.

John Piper, one of my favorite authors and pastors, he writes this "genuine gratitude is an act of the heart's affections, not an act of lip service. It is not willed, but awakened. It is not a decision of the will, but a reflex of the heart. It happens to us. We become aware of good and will toward us, and we have a choice, either we will feel gratitude, or we will be ungrateful." And we have a choice to obey, and when those men made the choice to be obedient to Jesus, something very important happened in their life, didn't it? But look what happens in verse 15. Here's the tragedy of the story, the tension in the story, the first three words in verse 15 one of them. One of them. One of them. When he saw he was healed came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus feet, and he thanked him, and then another five words that create the tension of this story -- and he was a Samaritan.

Why is that so important in this story? Why would any region matter in this story? Because Samaritans were despised by the Jewish Nation. They intermarried. They were not a pure Jewish race, so they were despised. That's why when Jesus goes to the Samaritan woman at the well, there are people that are like, why would you go to Samaria? Don't you know? Nothing good happens there. Nothing good is there. Why would you go do that? The Bible says that he was a Samaritan, that you don't go there. It was politically and socially incorrect for a Jew to even pass through that region, and for the first time, this one man no longer has to yell out, I'm unclean! For months, for years maybe, this is the first time that I believe Jesus reached down and took a hold of his shoulder, and he's been held on to by someone in the outside world because not only was he clean, understand the story here. Not only was he clean, he now had the right to go back to the priest with a clean bill of life and run back to his house for the first time in maybe months or years.

To run back to house and embrace his kids. To run back to his house and give his wife a huge hug and say I have been cleansed. I have been freed. I have been fully healed, and the truth is, the more deeply we understand God's love, the more grateful you and I are going to be. The more we understand God's love for us, the more grateful we are going to be. And I think at times, we miss it. Because look what happens in verse 17, Jesus asks the question, I think the same question that you and I would ask, Jesus being fully human and fully God at the exact same moment he asked the question, wait a minute. Were not all 10 cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner, this Samaritan? Has no one come back? Do you understand what was just done to you? Do they not understand that not only were they healed, but I have given their lives back, their families, their friendships.

They were completely restored, but they chose to walk away, to forget to simply say thanks, to simply say to the Son of God, thank you. The "Huffington Post" this last week came out and they shared that they have done a survey among the top companies in the United States. Apple, Amazon, Microsoft and Google. They asked this from different employees in these companies, from like the facility's guy who cleans up the floors at night all the way up to the Senior Vice President, all the way through the hierarchy system. They asked the question, just this one question, what is the one thing that would inspire you to do better? In the company you are in, what would inspire you to do a better job for the team? What would inspire you to do a better job for the company? Beyond pay, beyond positions, beyond the corner office, beyond recognition at the company picnic, beyond the jelly of the month club you are going to get at Christmas, or bonuses. And you know what? This is what they said, overwhelmingly this response came back -- I would just like to hear the words thanks. I would just like to hear the words, you know what? We need you. I would like to hear the words, I'm so grateful that you are on this team.

And Jesus is saying the same thing to us today. Where are you? I have orchestrated moments in your life. I have done small things in your life to get your attention. I have done miraculous things in your life. Did you not see what I have done, how I have prepared, how I have come through, the miracles I have performed, and like many of us in this room including myself today, I forget. I walk away. I take the credit. I get the trophy when I need to recognize it was Jesus all along, and I need to respond back to reposition my heart back and say, God, I just want to say thank you. Jesus, I want to say thank you. So how do I take this story that happened 2,000 years ago and lay it over my life today in 2018 as we come into one of the most consumer driven moments of our life.

Already consumer reports has said, we have gone over the mark of money spent this holiday season like ever before. So in a holiday where it feels like we have to get more, and we have to get better, and we have to get it faster, and we want it now, how can this ever apply to our life? And I think we begin again. I think we re-practice things that will unlock gratefulness in our life, and the first thing is, the beginning of a grateful heart is not letting what I want rob me of what I have. I think so many times, especially in my life, I can go on to the next, the bigger and better and I forget about what God has already given me, and I think this scenario probably plays out in your life like it does in mine. When I go home today from church, when I pull up to my house, a huge door will open automatically with the push of a button where I pull my car into an organized garage.

I go inside to a warm home and I'll say something probably like this to my wife. Traffic was terrible today on 470. It took me ten minutes longer. They are never going to get it done. It's going to go on forever. I'm going to open my refrigerator door and stick my head in the refrigerator door and see all of the food, and then you know what? I'm going to proclaim, there's nothing to eat in this house. I'm going to set down on my big soft couch, turn on my flat screen T.V. with 150 channels and then I'll probably say something to my kids like, there's nothing on T.V. I will go to my closet where I have tons of clothes and shoes and socks, and I'll say, you know what? I have nothing to wear -- and my point is this. It's amazing how much we have, and so little grateful we have become.

Paul says in Philippians 4:11-13, he says, I have found the secret of contentment. I have found the secret of gratefulness, for I have learned to

be content whatever the circumstances. He didn't arrive on that. He says, I have learned over time what it is to be content in circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. Paul was in prison. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want, and here's why, Paul says -- I can do all things when I remember who the ultimate provider is. I can do all things through Jesus who gives me strength. That is the author. That is the one where everything comes from, and so many times in my life, I surpass that.

I think, God, I've got this. This is in my own strength. I wipe out and I wonder, wow, how did that happen? But when I reposition my heart back toward God's direction for my life, important things begin to take place. The second thing, and this is a tough saying for us in the United States. It's tough for us in the United States in the Church in the United States, but the beginning of a grateful heart is understanding that my personal comfort does not equal God's blessing. Let that sink in a minute.

Nowhere in scripture, you will not find it in God's Word are we promised worldly ease in return for our pledge of faith. It's not written. It's not going to happen. In fact, the most devout saints from the Bible usually died penniless receiving a one way ticket to prison or death by torture, and I certainly don't believe -- listen to me, Church, I do not believe God has chosen me above others because I have "pastor" in front of my name. That God did not choose me because of the numbers of my prayer, or that I serve in high school ministry or kids ministry or that I checked all the spiritual boxes or how I practice my faith, still, if I take advantage of those opportunities, a comfortable life may come my way, but it's not guaranteed, but if it does happen, I don't believe Jesus will call me blessed because of what I consumed. I believe he will ask me these questions: Kip, what are you doing with it? Kip, will you use it for yourself? Will you use it to help? Will you use it to spread the Gospel, the Good News, around the world? Will you share it, or will you hold it close for comfort?

My blessing is this. Your blessing is this. Again, it's not what we get. It's not what we consume. My blessing is this, that I know a God that gives hope to the hopeless. That I know a God that loves the unlovable. I know a God that comforts the sorrowful. I know a God who has planted the same power within me. You see, it's more about our position in Christ than what we can consume. God calls us blessed because our identity is found in His Son, the personal work of Jesus Christ, and when we turn our feet, and when we turn our heart in following Jesus Christ, he offers us forgiveness, and he offers us peace, and when darkness comes, and when the bottom drops out, we can trust a God who calls us blessed because of His Son's work at the cross. Turn back to Deuteronomy 8 with me.

Deuteronomy 8, this -- these few verses were written over 5,000 years ago to the Nation of Israel, and I think they apply to us today. I believe they apply to us today in 2018. It's God reminding the Israelites, look how and look what I have done for you. Deuteronomy 8:10 says this, when you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He's given you. Be careful that you do not forget The Lord your God failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Listen to what verse 12 says, if you forget about Me otherwise when you eat and are satisfied, and when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your sheds and your flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud, and you will forget about God.

You will forget about God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known about to humble and to test you so that in the end, it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, my power, and my strength of my hands have provided this wealth for me. But God says, remember. Remember The Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms His covenant with your ancestors as it is today.

The last thing in beginning again is the beginning of a grateful heart is remembering God is the giver of all good things. When the bottom drops out, remember that God is the giver of all good things. When you go through tragedy, and you cannot trace the hand of God, remember that God is the giver of all good things. When God blesses you and reminds you that life is good because of His Son's payment, that God is the giver of all good things. James 1:17 every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of Heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows. So as you look from the Old Testament to the New, you recognize that God is the giver of all things. God gave Noah the plan for the ark, the ability to build it, to save his family.

God gave the Israelites bread from the Heaven in the morning and fire by night. God gave David a stone to kill that huge giant Goliath. God gave Jonah a fish to swallow him and send him back up on the shore. God gave the Virgin Mary the simple faith to just obey and give birth to the King of Kings in a lowly shed. God gave the Wisemen a star to lead them to the Savior. God gave the world the Prince of Peace, the Lamb of God, the Savior. God gave you the final sacrifice through the death of His Son Jesus Christ. God offers you forgiveness, peace and hope through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ, and God gives you peace that passes understanding when dark moments come.

God gives you the Holy Spirit to encourage and strengthen you and bring you back to truth. God gives you hard, difficult moments to deepen your faith and cause you to simply trust Him again. God gives you His Word to guide you, restore you, grow you so you can become like Jesus. He gives you a mission to serve His Kingdom so we can make a difference in this world. God gives you health to live and not just endure. God gives you great friends to love you, support you and help you cross the finish line some day, and God gives you a mission with Jesus to pushback darkness in this world. God is completely good. God will never not be good. God is constantly good. God could never be less than good. God is unchangeably good. Everything our God does is good. When I choose gratitude, my heart is repositioned to God's direction in my life.

Let's pray. Father, I come before You and just say once again, that I miss gratitude at times in my life. That I can be a very ungrateful person, that I can be thankless. God, I pray that You would teach me, like You taught Paul, to learn to be content. That we will not take all of the stuff that we have gathered with us, that the only two things that will last for eternity are the souls of humans, and the Word of God. Allow me to be content to learn to be content by remembering that You are a good God. You are a good Father. We love you. Amen.