

## **Gratitude: An Indication that the Kingdom is Present**

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The Gospel of Luke contains a significant amount of material not found in the other two Synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Mark). Much of this material unique to Luke appears after the second prediction of Jesus' death (Matt. 17:22; Mark 9:31; Luke 9:44) and before the third passion prediction (Matt. 20:17, Mark 10:33; Luke 18:31). A quick look at the passages just cited shows that three chapters of Matthew are condensed to one chapter in Mark, but fill 9 chapters in Luke.

Many of the themes of Luke's gospel (inclusion of Gentiles, prayer, joy, women, riches, sin and sinners, Holy Spirit) surface in special ways in this section (Luke 9-18). This article focuses on healing of the 10 lepers (Luke 17:11-19). Two concepts essential to understanding Luke 17 in context are Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees and his teaching concerning the nature of the kingdom. One might call these "what the kingdom is not" and "what the kingdom is."

In Luke 14, Jesus eats in the home of a Pharisee. From that event comes confrontation with the Pharisees concerning Sabbath activities, and questions of pride and table-seating patterns. Jesus continues by teaching about who may be invited to participate in the kingdom, the cost of discipleship, and the "lost" parables of chapter 15 (spoken to encourage tax collectors and sinners, but a source of strife and muttering among the Pharisees). The "money" parables and teachings of chapter 16 also appear directed to the Pharisees, for they loved money (16:14). The kingdom is not what the Pharisees think. Kingdom does not result in power, prestige, prominence, possessions, and human accolades. The Kingdom is open to those the Pharisees would exclude. The Kingdom is defined by forgiveness, faith, and willing service as one does one's duty (17:1-10).

In Luke 17:20, Jesus answers the Pharisee's question about when the kingdom would come. His answer is "it is among you" (v. 21). The kingdom is sudden and unexpected; it is characterized by just judgments, humble worship, childlikeness, and self-sacrifice which result in true treasures (chap. 17-18).

Between these two sections of "what the kingdom is not" and "what the kingdom is" lies our text. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, where he will demonstrate genuine kingdom service. On the outskirts of a village he meets 10 lepers who were required to announce their uncleanness and maintain a distance. Leprosy made friends of enemies, for one of the ten was a Samaritan, one who would otherwise have been excluded from Jewish social groups. That they ask Jesus for pity does not require that they know who he is. They would have asked for pity (money) from any they met. Jesus tells them to present themselves to the priest. That they went (on) may or may not suggest that they were obeying him. The text simply says that as they went, they were cleansed. The Samaritan connected his healing with the contact with Jesus. He returned, praising God and thanking Jesus profusely. It is only at this point that the text reveals that this grateful man has been an outcast twice—as a leper, and as a Samaritan.

Jesus' question focuses the point. Where are the others? Weren't there ten? Is it really true that only this foreigner gives praise to God? Faith is not found only among "kingdom folks." The kingdom is not always where we think it is. We may be mistaken as were the Pharisees. We may fail to see the kingdom when it is among us.

During this traditional week of thanksgiving, let us recognize that one characteristic of kingdom people is gratitude. Will you praise God for his bounty? Will you be thankful to Him? Do we really know what the kingdom is like?