

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

CHRIST GAVE HIS LIFE FOR YOU

MARCH 8-14, 2015



MAIN POINT

When we understand the depth of our sinfulness, we will respond with deep, life-altering gratitude.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Aside from trusting in Christ, what is the biggest or most important personal life change you have made (losing weight, changing careers etc.)? What motivated you to make those changes?
2. What barriers did you face as you sought to make that change in your life? What kept you from giving up? Is your life better for making these changes?

Leader: It's easy to identify changes we need to make in our lives, but making the decisions necessary to follow through with those changes is another matter. We often take steps toward life change but find ourselves failing to stay the course when making that life change becomes difficult or costly. The key to making lasting life changes is *motive*. It is not enough to see the changes we need to make, we must *feel* the necessity of these changes on a heart-level. This is true of our relationship with Christ, if we hope to make the changes in our lives necessary to living a life of full devotion to Christ, we must *feel* the depth of our sinfulness. When we understand how deeply we need God's grace, we will respond to it with deep, life-altering gratitude.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 2:1-3.

3. Why does it matter that we understand we were dead in our sins and not simply near death, mostly dead, or just pretty bad off?
4. Why did Paul refer to his audience in past tense terms here? If in Christ these truths are past tense, then why does Paul want us to remember that past condition?

Leader: Paul reached a dismaying conclusion about the depth of sin: by nature we are children under wrath. In our sinful nature, we all deserve eternal condemnation. We are born into this fallen condition. Without God's grace, all human beings are spiritually helpless and hopeless. Paul was not morbid; nor was he obsessed with bad news. He understood that if we are to truly appreciate the greatness of our salvation in Jesus, then we must understand the gravity of our situation. For the Christian, then, to revisit the sinful nature of humanity is a healthy practice.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 17:11-19.

5. Why does Luke note that the lepers cried out to Jesus from a distance? What motivated them to try so hard to get His attention?

6. What is Jesus' response to the lepers? How would most people in the first century likely respond to a leper?

Leader: In Luke 17 Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where He would be arrested and crucified. Most Jews in Jesus' time would have taken a detour to avoid entering Samaria. The Jews considered Samaritans half-breeds who were unworthy of God's love or their friendship. However Jesus walked through Samaria rather than take the preferred (and longer) route of the day. While He was passing through, He encountered a group of ten lepers. Lepers were victims of a skin disease that made them outcasts with no hope of a normal future. They were even forced to announce themselves to oncoming people, so as not to infect others. The lepers called to Jesus from a distance because they were aware that their contact with other people would make them unclean. (Leviticus 13:42-46). These men recognized Jesus and knew that He was able to heal them. They begged for Jesus' mercy, and He responded by healing them.

7. How did the majority of the lepers respond to being healed (v. 17)? If you were one of the nine who did not return to Jesus, how would you rationalize not going back to Jesus to express your gratitude?

8. Why did Jesus emphasize the fact the one leper who returned to give thanks was a "foreigner"? What does the Samaritan learn about himself, his healing, and about Jesus that the other nine lepers did not?

9. According to Jesus, what made the Samaritan well (v. 19)? Based on this story, how would you make the connection between faith and gratitude (vv. 16-19)?

Leader: Of the ten lepers only the one Samaritan returned to thank Jesus. This man did not seek a private moment with Jesus to express his gratitude. Instead he screamed praise and thanksgiving to God so everyone could hear. It seems that this Samaritan man was keenly aware not only that he was physically unclean but that He was spiritually unclean as well. While all ten lepers were healed of their physical defilement, only the Samaritan received spiritual healing as Jesus recognized his faith (v. 19). By identifying the foreigner, Jesus showed the "superiority" of the foreign man of faith to the Jewish men who lacked faith. Jesus' statement that the man's faith had made him well indicates that the Samaritan received more than physical healing that day.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. **How does a keen awareness of the depth of our sinfulness and the fact that we are no longer dead in our sins help us maintain an attitude of gratefulness for Christ's sacrifice? How might we lovingly help each other maintain such an attitude?**
11. **What keeps you from being grateful to God for your salvation? What are some practical ways we could overcome these barriers and grow in gratefulness to God?**
12. **Why is it important to remember our need for God's grace as we seek to share it with others? How might we focus on God's grace so as to increase our gratitude to Him?**

Leader: Challenge your group members to come up with some practical ways they might be more mindful of and grateful for God's grace in their lives. For instance, they could share one thing they are grateful for before each meal this week. Or they could take the "30 Days of Praise" challenge by writing a list of three things they are grateful to God for, every day for 30 days without repeating anything. Another helpful practice in cultivating gratitude is to take inventory of your life now versus your life in the past—to do this you could write a list of three ways Christ has changed you each night before going to bed this week (these don't have to be big or dramatic changes, every change God has made in our hearts and lives is evidence of His grace and love).

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, thank God for His gift to you in Jesus Christ. Pray that God would help us to cultivate hearts of gratitude in all situations and circumstances. Ask God that in whatever situations come our way we may be a people who are consistently marked by gratitude to God.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **Is your life marked by gratitude for Christ's sacrifice? What steps can you take to cultivate a heart of gratitude towards God and others this week?**
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- ☐ The challenge to memorize 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

EPHESIANS 2:1-3

2:1. People are not willing to be found (saved) until they know they are lost. Paul reminded his readers of the awfulness of sin that results in every person being lost, separated from God. As long as they are still unbelievers, sinners are in fact best described as dead people. The terms translated “trespasses” and “sins” are similar in meaning. The first term means falling from a known path, that is, actively breaking a boundary or rule. The second means falling short of a required standard. Both refer to the universal human failure to do what is right, either actively or passively.

2:2-3. Another way to describe the helplessness of sinners is to think of it in terms of a lifestyle, step by step, headed in the wrong direction. No person can blame the world or the devil for their sinning. We have only ourselves to blame. It was our fleshly desires that we indulged. It was the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts that have been the source of our disobedience to God. God’s righteous judgment against sin is settled. In our sinful nature, we all deserved eternal condemnation. We were born into this fallen condition. Without God’s grace, all human beings are spiritually helpless and hopeless. We need salvation because of what sin has done to us.

LUKE 17:11-19

17:11. Jesus apparently walked along the border between Samaria and Galilee, then crossed the Jordan River at the nearest point, proceeding down the eastern bank of the Jordan toward the crossing point opposite Jericho, which is the next location mentioned in the narrative (18:35).

17:12-13. As if he were not unclean enough, Jesus met ten men who suffered from a terrible skin disease (see 5:12). The men knew their condition. Any contact with them made other people unclean (Lev. 13:42-46). Still, they knew Jesus’ reputation for healing, so they shouted from a distance. Calling Jesus “Master” (5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49), they begged for mercy. Mercy, in their case, would mean empathy and pity that would lead to an act of healing.

17:14. Jesus pronounced no great healing formula. He did nothing dramatic. He uttered a simple command: Go let the priests see you. Such a command demanded action from the sick men. To run to the priests meant to show them that they were no longer infected and so could return to normal human contacts. But they had to start to the priests before they were healed. All ten exercised faith in what Jesus said. They started for the priests. When they did, healing came.

17:15-16. As they proceeded to the priests, they were healed. One of the lepers upon observing his healing returned to give thanks to Jesus. It is then pointed out that this leper was a Samaritan. This one had been not only physically healed but spiritually healed as well (17:19). Whereas the other nine received God’s word and believed for a time, they fell short of the ultimate healing, i.e., experiencing the divine salvation. They had “been enlightened ... [and] tasted the heavenly gift” (Heb 6:4) in their experience of divine healing, but they fell short of saving faith.

17:17-19. Jesus responded to thanksgiving and praise with a surprising question: Where are the other nine who were healed? Did only this foreigner return to show what God had done and let God get the glory for it? Note that on Jesus’ lips foreigner was not a word of scorn and contempt. It was a statement of fact to bring to the attention of the town and especially of the disciples the identity of this man. By identifying the foreigner, He showed the “superiority” of the foreign man of faith to the Jewish men who lacked faith.

Jews saw Samaritans as the enemy (see John 4:9). These people came from the area near the city of Samaria, which King Omri built as the capital of the Northern Kingdom shortly after 900 B.C. The Assyrians destroyed the city in 721 B.C. The territory of Samaria lay between the Aijalon and Jezreel valleys and between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley. After the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, these people tried to maintain an identity as Israelites who worshiped the God of Israel on Mount Gerizim near Shechem. They thought of their name “Samaritan” as coming from a Hebrew word which meant “keepers of the law.” They

believed the great mistake in Israelite history was the move of the central sanctuary from Shechem to Shiloh in the time of Eli or before. They believed that King Darius of Persia sent Sanballat back from Babylon to build a Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim.

The Samaritans recognized only the five Books of Moses as sacred. Their text established Mount Gerizim as the worship center with unique readings at Exodus 20:18 and Deuteronomy 27:4. They looked for a Messiah like Moses to come and restore their religion and their land. Jews in the south around Jerusalem had a different view of the Samaritans. They saw them as descendants of foreigners whom the Assyrians brought in to replace the exiled Israelites in 721 B.C. Jerusalem saw Samaritan religion as only an attempt to learn how to worship the historical god of the region to avoid destruction (see 2 Kgs. 17:25-26).

Samaritans opposed Jews as they tried to rebuild the temple and walls of Jerusalem after the Babylonian Exile (Ezra 4:4-24). Papyri found in the Jewish settlement near the town of Elephantine in Egypt show letters from Samaritan priests as well as Jerusalem priests asking for help in building a temple shortly after 500 B.C. The Samaritans may have built a worship place some time after 400 B.C. This was destroyed in 128 B.C.

Samaritans again stirred Jewish ire by supporting Alexander the Great with troops when he invaded Egypt. During the Egyptian campaign, however, the Samaritans revolted, killed their governor, and then faced Alexander's retaliation. Alexander destroyed the rebuilt city of Samaria, sending the surviving Samaritans fleeing to Shechem. They rebuilt the city in 331, but the Jewish king John Hyrcanus destroyed it in 107 B.C. Immediately before Jesus came during the early Roman period, Pompey forced the Jews to quit persecuting the Samaritans as John Hyrcanus had, and then Herod initiated a huge building program in Samaria. Still, Samaritans did all they could to harass the Jews. They even forced Pontius Pilate from office.

On their first mission venture, Jesus' disciples were protected by not having to go to the Samaritans (Matt. 10:5-6; John 4). But Jesus also made Samaritans heroes of His stories to show the Jews the need for forgiveness, humility, acceptance, and mission (Luke 10:29-37; 17:10-11). He Himself attempted to minister in Samaria, but the Samaritans did not accept Him (Luke 9:52). He did bring a Samaritan woman and her townspeople to belief in Him (John 4). Jewish leaders tried to shame Jesus by accusing Him of being a Samaritan (John 8:48).

About A.D. 70 Emperor Vespasian besieged Mount Gerizim for a month and then slaughtered ten thousand Samaritans. Finally, Emperor Hadrian some time before A.D. 138 constructed a temple for Zeus Hypsisto on Mount Gerizim. Over the centuries Samaritan fortunes have varied. During the fifth century Palestine was home to almost a half million Samaritans. By the sixteenth century the Samaritan community was reduced to a dwindling number around ancient Shechem (or modern Nablus).