

Counting what Counts A Study of Luke 17:11-19

Characteristic of Completeness: Worship

Big Idea: Count the blessings that count forever.

Related Scriptures: Ephesians 1:1-14; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 3:17;

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Hebrews 13:15

Introduction:

1. There was a sad longing in his eyes. The pain was high that day and so was his fever; he could feel it radiating from his bones. During these flare-ups he was most contagious¹ and no one would go near him—no one except his buddies who already had leprosy. He ached with weariness and wanted to lie down. He wanted to be unconscious.

And yet he stood. He stood on his scabbed, disfigured feet and gazed intently outward along the dirt trail leading into his village. He brought his hand up to shield his gaze from the afternoon sun. It looked like a wax hand half melted in a fire. He couldn't feel it. He couldn't feel it touch his forehead. He couldn't feel it brush against the cauliflower tumors that covered his face. The leprosy deadened his nerves. And his life.

The man was a Samaritan, considered by Jews to be a half breed, a bastard child who represented impurity. And so his leprosy simply added insult to injury. Among the unclean, this man was the uncleanest.

This unclean man and nine other lepers waited together. Standing. It was a togetherness that only a shared tragedy can forge. They were lepers together. And so they were social outcasts together. Diseased. Discolored. Disfigured. Disgusting. Discarded. They were each other's only consolation. Until that day. Until that day when Jesus came to their village.

They heard that this Jesus was a healer and that He was going to be passing through. So they stood waiting for their only hope to arrive.

When Jesus appeared on the horizon and drew within earshot, the lepers began to call out in a ► mournful chorus:

^{NKJ} Luke 17:13 . . . "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

¹ Symptoms of leprosy are taken from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, s.v. "Diseases of the Bible," by R.H. Pousma (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, 1976), 138-139.

Jesus heard. Jesus saw. Jesus felt compassion for the little island of outcasts no one would go near. Jesus went near. But He didn't heal them. Not at first. Instead He simply ► said,

^{NKJ} Luke 17:14 . . . "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

They obeyed without question, hobbling away toward the synagogue on feet with missing toes. But I can imagine the confusion as they walked: "The priests are the ones to declare people clean or unclean, but why are we going to the priests now? We haven't been healed. They're just going to declare what we already know: we're still unclean."

But on the way, in an instant, all ten lepers were healed. For the one man, the radiating pain and fever were gone. His scabbed feet were now soft. His cauliflower face was now smooth. His melted-wax hands now had long, nimble fingers that could feel. And he touched his face again and again in wonderment.

And the ten men, now clean, began to scurry toward the synagogue where the priests would declare them clean.

But the one man stopped in his tracks. The other nine kept going. But the one stopped. He turned around. He went back.

► ^{NKJ} Luke 17:15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks.

And Jesus ► asked the one:

^{NKJ} Luke 17:17 . . . "Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine?"

2. On this Sunday before Thanksgiving, I want to be in the minority. I want to be like the one in ten.

The other nine were obedient; they did what they were told, they went to the priests.

And the other nine were excited I'm sure. Who wouldn't be? I suppose you might even say that the other nine were thankful in a general way—thankful for the healing. Thankful to be free from leprosy. Thankful to be able to do things.

But while the nine men were thankful in a general way, the one man was thankful in a personal way. While the nine men were feeling thankful for the healing, the one man gave thanks to the Healer. While the nine men were feeling good about having it good, the one man fell on his face ► to worship the Author of good. There's a difference.

This morning, I want to give thanks like the one man. A personal thanks. A worshipful thanks. To the Lord. I want to worship. And I invite you to join me.

3. But how would we do it? It does raise questions.

In the biblical account of the lepers, it is quite clear what they had to be thankful for: They were miraculously healed.

But most of us haven't been healed from leprosy. And truth be told, maybe things aren't going that great for you. I don't know anyone who would characterize these days in our country as "good times." Some of you have lost your jobs. Others have lost your home. Or your equity. Or your spouse. Or your child. Or your customers. Or your savings. Or your purity. Or your grip.

They're gone. Where's the thanksgiving in that?

4. I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul.

Paul could not count ► financial wealth as a blessing. He was an itinerant church planter, trying to make ends meet by making tents on the side. He was well acquainted with personal poverty, hunger, and suffering.²

Neither could Paul count ► health as a blessing. He was chronically ill. He repeatedly asked God to heal him, just like the lepers did, but God said, "no."³

Neither could Paul count ► strength as a blessing. He confessed to his friends that he was weak and timid and trembling in the face of daunting circumstances.⁴

Neither could Paul count ► happiness as a blessing. He was not always happy. In fact, at times, he felt discouraged, depressed, and even hopeless.⁵

Neither could Paul count ► popularity as a blessing. Some found him to be an unimpressive speaker who preached worthless sermons.⁶ And he was eventually martyred.

Neither could Paul count ► good looks as a blessing. One historian describes him as, "A man rather small in size, bald-headed, bow-legged, with meeting eyebrows, [and] a large, red and somewhat hooked nose."⁷

² Philippians 4:12.

³ 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:3.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 1:8.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 10:10.

⁷ Onesiphorous, *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, quoted by Ronald Brownrigg, *Who's Who in the New Testament*, (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 197), 322.

Neither could Paul count ► intelligence as a blessing. He was surely intelligent but he argues that his smarts didn't make him any better off.⁸

Neither could Paul count ► marriage as a blessing. He was single. No soul mate. No life partner. He was celibate.⁹

Neither could Paul count ► freedom as a blessing. Much of his ministry was spent in prison, where all he could really do was write letters—letters that would take weeks or months to deliver.

And yet, in one of his letters penned from prison, in spite of all the blessings he seemed to lack, Paul ► says that God . . .

^{NKJ} Ephesians 1:3 . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing . . .

That's right. That's exactly what Paul says in Ephesians 1:3. He's speaking to those of us who have believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life. He says: God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

How can he say that? The guy's pretty much a loser in terms of the blessings most folks are chasing these days. So, how can he claim to have every blessing?

He can say it because he's not counting temporary blessings. He can say it because he's not counting the blessings that evaporate sooner or later. He can say it because he's counting the blessings that count forever. And that's what I'd like us to do this morning: ► Count the blessings that count forever.

Nothing wrong with counting temporary blessings. I do. But if that's all you do, you may be setting yourself up for a big disappointment. Because they don't last. They may be here today and gone tomorrow. They are fleeting. And when you just count temporary blessings and nothing more, you're always going to come up short. There will always be something lacking. Someone else will always have something you don't.

But, as a believer in Jesus Christ, when you count the blessings that count forever, you never come up short. You always have them all. So we're going to count some blessings that count forever. And Paul is going to help us.

5. After Paul says that believers have every spiritual blessing, he helps us think through what some of them are. And just like the one leper who returned, Paul ties all the blessings back to God.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:20.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:8.

In fact, in Ephesians, Chapter 1, Paul seems to unpack the blessings we receive from each person of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, in that order. And that offers us a tidy way to give thanks together this morning in three waves: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- I. Let's first count the blessings from the Father that are reflected in the first six verses of Ephesians 1. I'm just going to summarize them without much supporting detail or analysis. You're just going to have to trust that I've done my homework. Our focus this morning is on giving thanks, not on giving proof.¹⁰

The original Greek word for "father" means "nourisher, protector, upholder." That God would use this word, "father" to describe Himself to us indicates that He wants us to know that He is our nourisher; He is our protector; He is our upholder. And so, count it, you are ► secure. Safe. Provided for.

And Paul says we are ► chosen. The Father was in no way obligated or indebted to choose us. He doesn't owe anyone anything, and His options are boundless. He could have chosen anyone. He was not even limited by the number of human beings that exist because He Himself created the human pool from which He chooses. The Father could have adopted anyone as His child. He chose you. Count it.

And that means you are exceedingly ► honored and ► wonderful. God does not choose on the basis of our record or our merit or our performance or our talent or our character or our foreseen potential. In fact, by all these things we show ourselves to be undeserving of selection. God's choice is by grace alone. So we are honored to be chosen. And we are wonderful to be so favored and yet so undeserving. Count it.

Our Father did not adopt us so that we could live as freed orphans pursuing our own agendas. He adopted us so that we might come into the family of which He is head, and carry out His family business. And so we are ► accountable to Him. It's a blessing to be accountable. We're accountable because He cares. Count it.

We are described as sons, children of God. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if we believers are also children of God in Christ, that means the Father feels about us the same way He feels about Jesus because we are in Jesus. So we are ► exalted. Count it, exalted.

And we are ► fully known. Our Father chose us "before the foundation of the world." Our Father knew everything about us before we ever existed. He is not constrained by time; He sees all of history—past, present, and future—all at once. It means that our Father will never become disillusioned about choosing us because He already knows everything about us. We are fully known. Count it.

¹⁰ If you'd like the proof, I'd be happy to provide it. Just go to our website, www.moonvalleybible.org, and email me your request.

And Paul says we are holy, which means we are ► set apart—set apart for a relationship with our Father. Count it. And the relationship is made possible because our sins have been paid for such that we are now ► blameless. Count it, blameless. Our Father cleans us up so that we can come before Him, in His presence, to experience His love. He loves us infinitely. Count it, we ► are loved.

And Paul says we are ► adopted. Count it, adopted. When our Father adopted you, you became a new person. The identity you had before the adoption has been entirely relinquished. And the greatness of now having God as our Father is multiplied when we realize who our old spiritual father was before the adoption. Your old father, Satan, is a deceitful tyrant who is out to abuse you. But you've been ► rescued—count it—rescued from an abusive situation.

And our Father paid the price of our adoption not according to circumstances that forced Him, not according to our performance that obligated Him, but “according to the good pleasure of His will.” That means we are pleasing to our Father. In fact, we are ► delightful to Him. Count it, you are delightful.

And Paul says we are completely ► accepted by our Father for who we are. Fully known and still fully accepted. That's you. Count it, accepted.

We've counted some of the blessings that count forever. Now, we're going to have an opportunity to turn back and give thanks for these blessings, just like the leper turned back. We're going to observe a moment of silence in which you can give thanks to the Lord. And then, just like that one man, we're going to glorify God with a loud voice by singing a song.

(Silence, then a song here)

II. Now let's count some more blessings that count forever from Ephesians 1:7-12. These are blessings from God the Son.

Paul says we are ► redeemed. It means to set a slave free by payment of a ransom. We were slaves bound to suffer the full payment or penalty for our moral failures. But Christ bore the cost or penalty of our sins Himself, on the cross, that we might be free. We merely have to believe in Christ and we are redeemed. Count it.

And forgiveness goes hand in hand with redemption. As believers in Jesus, we are ► forgiven. We are released from guilt. Freed from punishment. Utterly forgiven for every sin—past, present, and future. We're absolutely clean. We are forgiven. Count it.

And Paul says we are redeemed and forgiven “according to the riches of His grace.” Which means we are the recipients of the full value of God's grace. We didn't just get some of it; we got all of it. God gave us all He had to give. That's how much He values us. That means we are ► cherished. That's right, cherished. Count it.

Paul says this grace was “made to about toward us.” That is, grace has been ► lavished or showered upon us. God gives us far more grace than anyone could reasonably expect. We are lavished with grace in a way that is outrageously unexpected and unreasonable. No human would think this up. God didn’t just go the extra mile; He went every last mile for us. We are lavished with grace. Count it!

And Paul says God’s grace toward us involves “wisdom and prudence.” God gives us the insight we need to understand His grace. We are ► enlightened by God, so we can see it. Apart from such enlightenment, God’s grace would appear to be foolishness to us. We Christians are not those who, by ourselves, were somehow wise enough to believe in Jesus for eternal life. No. He enlightened us. Count it.

Paul says God has revealed all this to us “according to His good pleasure.” That is, it brings Him pleasure or satisfaction. It’s a satisfaction, “which He purposed in Himself.” That is to say, it’s a satisfaction that God planned all along, from eternity past. Grace through Christ is a gift God has had in mind for us forever. And giving it to us gratifies Him. Thus you are ► gratifying to God. Count it. You are gratifying.

And God’s plan is for us to be ► mobilized—mobilized under the headship of Christ. We are mobilized under the greatest leader, for the greatest cause, with the greatest results and the brightest future. Count it; we are mobilized.

And God is not sitting by the phone doing nothing but waiting for a call from us. No. We are ► sought after by God. He is actively communicating through His Word, through nature, through circumstances, through people, through the promptings of the Holy Spirit within us. His is constantly inviting, but not intrusive. Count it. We are sought after. Our part is to respond.

And so, let us respond with thanks. In this moment of silence, count the blessings that count forever and give thanks.

(Silence, then a song here)

III. And finally Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13-14.

As believers, we have the Holy Spirit living inside us, and by Him, we are ► empowered. The Spirit gives us the ability to do things we could not otherwise do. We have God in us. We are weak, but He is strong.

And by the Holy Spirit we are ► sealed. And the seal is unmistakable and unbreakable and unstoppable. It is indelible and irreversible and indestructible. It is guaranteed by God’s promise, not our performance. It is based on who you believe, not how you behave.

If you have believed in Jesus for eternal life, you are sealed. If you are convinced that the Jesus who died and rose again guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him, you are sealed. It’s a done deal. And God’s seal on you says, “No matter what—I will love you as my child no

matter what. You are mine, no matter what. You will remain the object of my unconditional love and acceptance forever, no matter what.”

God will never disown us. He will never forsake us. He will never abandon us. He will never become disillusioned with us. He will never regret us. He will never stop loving us. God’s seal on you says, “No matter what.”

And so, let us respond with thanks. In this moment of silence, count the blessings that count forever and give thanks.

(Silence, then a song here)