

## Reason to Rejoice

(The children are dismissed to go to their service with Pastor Brittany. If you are watching on line, you can still tune in at 12:15 for Pastor Brittany's lesson for the children.)

We announced we were going to share some things to rejoice about this morning. Turn to Luke 17. I want to share a word the Lord poured into my heart Thursday evening. I felt like the Lord was graciously trying to heal my spiritual sight and vision, encouraging me to change my focus. Perhaps you need that kind of spiritual adjustment during this season as well.

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

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the final time. He is in this border region between Samaria and Galilee when he is met by ten lepers. The term leper in the bible is not necessarily referring to Hansen's disease, the condition we typically think of as leprosy, but covered any number of skin diseases, all of which were considered contagious. Consequently, the Old Testament called for these people to be quarantined, separated from the community. They were considered unclean and had to announce themselves as such when others approached.

You may recall Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with each other. Jews considered Samaritans to be a mixed race and religiously and racially unclean. Samaritans didn't exactly care for the Jews either, but as the old saying goes, misery loves company. These nine Jewish men were outcast as lepers so they were essentially being treated like they were Samaritans. Rejected. No one had anything to do with them. So, it was no big deal to have a Samaritan leper quarantine with them. They were all in the same boat so to speak. The fact that Jesus had pity on a Samaritan leper was no doubt mind blowing to some that witnessed it or heard about it. How great is His mercy and compassion!

The bible says the men stood at a distance. Interesting isn't it? Who knew social distancing was a biblical practice? Don't let that get out or someone will file a law suit to stop the practice saying it violates the separation of church and state. Anyway, the ten men cried out "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

Something about calling him Master really struck me. The word can be translated as Commander. "Jesus, Commander, Master and Lord over all, have pity on us." Those ten guys had faith that Jesus was in control. They didn't ask him to heal them, they just said, "Master, Commander, have pity on us. We trust you. Help us however you choose!" Is Jesus the Master in your life? Is he Master in the storm, Master over the pandemic? Do you believe he is the Commander in Chief, Lord over all, and are you trusting him?

Verse 14 says "When he saw them." Ten men, nine Jews and one Samaritan, and when he saw them, he didn't discriminate, he made no distinction, he just saw ten men that needed healing, that needed his mercy and grace. When he saw them, he responded with hope and healing. "Go show yourself to the priest." It was what was prescribed in the Law for anyone who had been healed of leprosy. These men hadn't been healed, yet, but Jesus was saying, "Put your faith into action. If you believe in me, you'll obey and go to the priest." He wouldn't have told them to go show themselves to the priest if he hadn't intended to heal them. Now filled with hope they obeyed and as they went they were cleansed and healed of their leprosy!

Verse 15 tells us the Samaritan, the one the Jews considered "less than", the non-religious one, when he discovered the leprosy was gone, even though Jesus told him to go show himself to the priest, he just had to come back to give thanks. He could go to the priest later, but he was overcome with gratitude. When he saw what Jesus had done for him, He runs back praising God with a loud voice and throws himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. Jesus says, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Foreigner was a term that typically meant a pagan, a heathen, one that was outside the fold of Israel.

Jesus responds to this Samaritan man by telling him "Rise and go, your faith has made you well." It's interesting because it literally says your faith has "saved you." All ten were cleansed from leprosy, all ten were healed physically, but it seems this one Samaritan received something more. He received salvation, wholeness. Responding with gratitude and coming to Jesus in praise and surrender brought wholeness to his life. **Nine were declared clean by the**

**priest, but one was declared saved by the Savior!** Hallelujah! Gratitude lead him to embrace the best part. He found Jesus as truly the Master of all, not only Master over his physical body and physical needs, but Master and Savior of his life and his soul.

Look back at verse 15. **“When he saw he was healed...”** When this man realized what had happened, when he saw what the Lord had done in him and for him, he had to respond, so the bible says he came back rejoicing, giving thanks, praising God in a loud voice and he threw himself at Jesus feet and thanked him.

**When the Samaritan leper saw what Jesus had done, his focus changed.** I realized my focus had been on the wrong things the last few days, worried and fretting over all this “stuff.” Maybe you’ve been in that same place. Our focus has been too much on the virus, or on the response to the virus, or focused too much on what we’ve lost, or focused on the changes that have disrupted our day to day life, disrupted our plans, disappointed us or our children, our elderly friends and family, the list can go on. We need to do what this leper did. We need to stop and realize what Jesus has done. Stop and realize God has been at work in faithful ways through all of this! I stopped watching the news and reading Facebook because I had to start focusing on what God has done and on the good things he is still doing! He is still the Master!

I read something a pastor friend wrote a few days ago. I agreed with part of it, but he said, “Our churches have been silenced and the mission of the Kingdom is not being carried out.” He asked the Lord what was happening to the church and the Lord spoke to him about the importance of prayer. I agree with him about the need to pray, but I disagree with him about the idea that our churches have been silenced and the mission of the Kingdom is not being carried out. If the mission of the kingdom is to have church services in a building so the lost can come in and find Jesus, then he’s right we haven’t been carrying out the mission. But if the mission is announcing the good news of Jesus to everyone we can by every means and method we can and minister to people and equip and facilitate missionaries and feed the hungry and proclaim liberty to the captive, then I think the church is carrying out its mission. I’m not trying to just put a positive spin on things this morning, I’m trying to help us realize some of the good things that God has been up to in the midst of all this. I’ve said it before, God is up to something greater than we think. **When we realize what He has done, we need to respond with rejoicing!**

Let me share some reasons I’m rejoicing today. This is all about Jesus and his faithfulness and goodness to us. He doesn’t love Oklahoma more than he does other states and

he doesn't love Carbondale more than he loves other churches, and every church will have their own list of things God has done for them, but let me just brag on Jesus this morning, and let me brag a bit on the faithful members of this church.

I read this past week, 46% of churches are still waiting to meet for in-person worship. 52% are open with precautions in place, like us, 2% are able to meet without any precautions of any kind. Praise the Lord we've been able to meet in person for the past two months. I know it's different, but we're here! And praise the Lord that for those who don't feel comfortable yet gathering in person we can provide on line services, and that includes Sunday School and Wednesday night and youth service and children's ministry and Ark Park lessons. Rejoice in what we've been able to do! I said a couple of weeks ago I had felt this was the year people were supposed to come home to Carbondale. I've been amazed at people who have come home virtually, on line, watching faithfully from home in other places across the nation! Thank God. The church is still meeting, it just looks a bit different. Understand we've had people not just come home to Carbondale in terms of viewing the service, but I mean come home to Jesus, renew their faith, truly commit their lives to Christ during this! Hallelujah! And speaking of that...

We need to thank God for the media team at Carbondale that have allowed us to have a seamless transition from in person to online and now back to a blended approach. Those weeks when we were totally online with no in-person services, the media team was here every Sunday. We still had to have lights and camera operators and sound and words on the screen all the magic makers it takes and they were faithful every week. Thank God for the media team!

Barna released a report in the last couple of weeks stating that 1 out of every 3 Christians has stopped attending church, not just stopped attending in person, but 1 out of 3 is not attending or not even watching on line. That may be the national trend, but it's not Carbondale. Between in person services and our live stream and social media, we still have more than 600 people per week that by one means or another are engaging with our Church. We need to give thanks to God for that. You've remained faithful! People are still being reached with the good news.

People worried about whether giving would remain strong in the churches, and some churches have experienced loss, but our financial giving has remained strong. We've been able to meet every obligation, we've been able to continue the support of our missionaries around the world and even more. We were able to give monthly support to some of our evangelists who

were suddenly without income and meetings. This summer you gave thousands of dollars to our missionary guests, over \$8,000 to Josh and Lindy Johnson, over \$10,000 to Alan Griffin and his ministry last Sunday. I shared with you recently the pandemic caused brothels to close in some of the large cities in the world because there were no customers. The sex traffickers feared the virus and couldn't afford to feed the women so they let them go. An opportunity was given through Project Rescue; they could rescue these ladies, provide a place to live and job training so they could have a new life. I shared that opportunity with the board and I'm happy to tell you Carbondale gave \$25,000 dollars to help these ladies and that amount was matched by a grant to Project Rescue! When you see what he has done, you have to rejoice and give thanks!

We've been able to give groceries to more than 120 families each month since March, and the groceries have been paid for and provided by the George Kaiser Family Foundation. We've been able to bless families in need in our church and in our community.

We had 112 kids attend and participate in our virtual VBS. Thanks to Pastor Brittany and thanks parents for participating. Many of those were children whose parents don't attend church here. And let me add a thank you to the parents who've brought your children to the Sunday services. They'll continue to join us for worship before going to their own service with Pastor Brittany. I know it may have been more challenging for parents but aren't you thankful our kids have been exposed to Pentecostal worship and the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? They've seen Mom and Dad engage in worship and prayer. When you realize what God has done, what he's provided, you have to respond with gratitude and praise!

We had 77 campers plus I don't know how many college students and adult sponsors that attended and participated in our youth camp. They had powerful times of worship and prayer with and for each other with Pastor Jeff and with Alan Griffin as our camp speaker. Praise God!

In the midst of the pandemic we were able to provide the use of our missions house at a moment's notice to one of our missionary families that had 48 hours to leave their home on the field with nowhere to go. They reached out to us and we were able to put them in the house.

There is so much to thank God for. Protection for members of our church family. Miracles of healing that have happened. I don't know if I've yet processed the miracle that God provided for Greg Mundis, the head of the AGWM. Greg and Sandi are friends, they have preached in our church. Sandy was the director of Europe's Children, the missions agency that Sarah worked with so they are close friends of Sarah. Greg was so close to death for so long.

Five weeks in a medically induced coma, on a ventilator, battling for his life with people praying around the world. God healed Greg Mundis. It's a miracle. And Mikel French. We were praying constantly for Mikel. Talking to Marsha and he was so sick and she was so worried, and God healed Mikel. We have been so fortunate. God has been so kind. Jesus has been so gracious to us. When you see what he has done, you have to respond with thanks and praise.

I don't want to be like the nine lepers that stayed focused on the wrong thing. Please don't think I've told any of this today for any reason other than to point us to the good grace and mercy and faithfulness of our God. When we realize what he has done, when we stop and think how he has gone before us and led us, I believe he has given us wisdom and direction, I believe he is guiding us through this. I don't expect everyone to agree with every decision we've made, but I know we can agree that God has been faithful. You can agree he is worthy of our praise and thanks this morning. We can all agree that when we realize how good and faithful he is, it calls for a response of praise and a response of rejoicing. Let's be like the Samaritan leper, let's run to him and fall at his feet and loudly shout his praise. Let's give him thanks. Lift your eyes to him. Shift your focus from all the pandemic and all the controversy and look to Jesus. Start praising him and expressing gratitude to him. Come on He's worthy of our praise! If we don't give thanks in this, we are going to miss what God has for us. Our focus will be messed up and misplaced. Come on and praise him!

Listen to me. The leper that came back with gratitude and praise is the one that got more than he ever expected, more than he planned for. God has more for you in this season. He'll surprise you. It's not just cleansing or healing, its wholeness, it's salvation, it's deliverance, it's restoration, it's more than you imagine. He wants to make you whole. Respond and rejoice and give him thanks and praise. Stop focusing on what you've lost and start praising him for what you've gained. Don't focus on what you can't do, focus on what you can do. Don't focus on doors that closed, focus on the open doors God has set before you! Don't focus on the pandemic, focus on the Master, the Commander, the Waymaker, the Provider. Jesus said **“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:28.** Don't put your head down, don't despair, look up and rejoice! Redemption is near. We've got a reason to rejoice! Look what the Lord has done!