

WHEN LAST DID YOU SAY ‘THANK YOU’?

Today’s Text: Lk 17: 11-19

Extracts:

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered, and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?” [Lk 17: 11-17]

Yvonne Chaka Chaka (1965-) is perhaps the best known post-apartheid South African artiste to break into the international music stage.¹ She sang at Nelson Mandela’s 85th birthday party (2003) and has met Queen Elizabeth (UK) and Oprah Winfrey (USA). Her song, "Umqombothi" (African Beer) was featured in the opening scene of the 2004 Oscar-nominated movie, Hotel Rwanda, and her songs and albums have won multiple awards. Of interest to us here is her 1998 release called “Thank You Mr. D.J.” which became an instant hit all over Africa. In that song, she says, “Thank you Mr. D.J. for playing my song. Thank you, thank you, I have been waiting so long.”

Before the era of the YouTube, iPod and iTunes, the disc jockey (D.J. or deejay), whether on the radio or at clubs, determined which songs got played. But how many artistes remembered him/her among those that they should thank for the success of their music? Yvonne did and the amount of air play her songs received all over Africa from the late 1990’s confirms how much the D.J.s appreciated her compliment. There is a lesson there for all us. How many of us remember to thank those that have done us favours? How many of us remember to thank God each day we wake up alive? In this week’s Bible story, Jesus healed ten lepers but only one of them came back to thank Him. It cut His generous heart. Are you like the one who returned to thank Him or the nine who did not?

Let us find out.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: “Thank You Mr. D.J.” From *Princess of Africa: The Best of Yvonne Chaka Chaka* [1999]; <http://new.music.yahoo.com/yvonne-chaka-chaka/tracks/thank-you-mr-dj--198614821> and <http://www.answers.com/topic/yvonne-chaka-chaka#ixzz1Gg7Wm8ER>

1. Background: Only a foreigner returned to thank Jesus

Thank you! Two words that mean so much and yet two words that many find too difficult to utter! We are not talking about mere words but *an attitude of gratitude*. Many of us can use the words a zillion times a day and yet do not show it in how they relate to their benefactors. Therefore, we should all be open-minded on how we see ourselves on this subject!

In the Bible text, Jesus was said to be passing through Samaria and Galilee *on the way to Jerusalem* [Lk 17: 11]. Do you know why He was going to Jerusalem? He was going to His death by crucifixion. You can then imagine what could be passing through His mind at that time. As a human being, His soul was already sorrowful unto death but He did not yet show it until He got to the Garden of Gethsemane [Matt. 26: 38]. If we were in His place, that would not be the time to worry about other people's problems. But that was the time that Jesus encountered ten lepers, standing afar off [Lk 17: 12]. Let us follow the story from there:

a) *It was the lepers themselves who came to Jesus for healing*

Standing afar off, the ten lepers lifted up their voices and cried, saying to Him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" [v. 13]. Under the Law of Moses, lepers were outcasts. On lepers, the Lord said to Moses, "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp *every leper*,.... You shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell" [Num. 5: 2-3]. Lepers remained isolated until they were pronounced clean (healed) by the priests [Lev. 14: 1-18]. You can then imagine the state of those ten lepers that cried out to Jesus. They had been isolated- perhaps for too long because they were not getting better. Their mere presence in the crowds put clean people in such assemblies at risk, physically and spiritually.

You may have been isolated from the rest of society by disease (such as HIV/AIDS) or by divorce from your loved ones. You may have been reduced to unanticipated poverty by unemployment, ethnic or religious conflicts or a natural disaster, such as the recent massive earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Perhaps, like the ten lepers, you may have had the need to go to Jesus, crying aloud, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

b) *Jesus healed them*

In spite of His own personal agony, Jesus had compassion on the ten lepers and said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests" [Lk 17: 14]. Under the Law of Moses, it was the priests who went into the leper camps to examine them there. Those that were pronounced healed were then

required to bring sacrifices, including cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop, for cleansing and to facilitate their re-entry into society [Lev. 14: 3-8]. But Jesus asked them to go and show themselves to the priests, not the other way around. Therefore, Jesus was testing the faith of the lepers. They could have refused to go to their priests because Jesus was not following their doctrine that it was the priests that should come to examine them in their isolated camp. They chose to walk by faith “and so it was that as they went, they were cleansed” [Lk 17: 14]!

Jesus may have already spoken to your situation. You are already healed but you must complete your medical therapy. Your fortunes will be restored but you must move with others into the relief centre for now. Your sin may have made you like scarlet and as red as crimson [Is. 1: 18] but the blood of Jesus like hyssop can make your soul as white as snow [Ps. 51: 7]. By faith, all those things will come to pass for you, provided you hear and obey His word!

c) *But only the Samaritan returned to thank Him*

After the ten found themselves healed on the way to show themselves to the priests, one of them returned “and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at [Jesus’] feet, *giving Him thanks.*” Jesus said to him, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” [Lk 17: 15-17].

It is instructive that this foreigner, the Samaritan, cried aloud when he needed Jesus’ help and also cried aloud when he came to thank Him. *This man glorified God and thanked Jesus.* We know of certain circumstances where Jesus told people He had healed or helped, such as Jairus whose daughter He had raised from the dead, to tell no one what had happened [Lk 8: 56]. In the case of the mad man at Gadara from whom He had cast out legions of demons, Jesus specifically told him to go to his own house and “tell what great things God had done for you.” The man went his way and proclaimed “throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him” [v. 39]. That is ‘thank you!’ in action.

The above story suggests that while the glory goes to God, *gratitude should also be expressed to those that God has used to do us favours.* Jesus was grieved that His own people, the nine lepers of Jewish origin, did not come back to thank Him. Only the Samaritan, a member of the group despised by the Jews, came back to express gratitude. Can you imagine how much the foreigner’s gesture lifted the Lord’s spirit at that hour? ‘Thank you!’ are pleasant words that are “like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones” [Prov. 16: 24]. Recall how Paul reacted to the gifts sent to him by the Philippians. He said, “I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling

aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” [Phil. 4: 18-19]. So, what makes you tongue-tied when it comes to saying ‘thank you’ to God and people that He has used to bless you?

2. How we may miss saying ‘thank you!’

Before we pronounce judgment on the nine lepers that did not return to thank Jesus, let us look at possible reasons for their action. As we look around our situation, we can agree that people may miss saying ‘thank you’ for one or more of the following reasons, among others:

a) *When we take favours for granted*

Some people take for granted favours done to them under the guise that they deserve or are entitled to them. For example, children can easily take for granted all the efforts their parents put in to raise or educate them. Some husbands hardly commend their wives that sacrifice their own comfort to take care of them and their children. We also extend the same attitude to God. For example, when all is well with us, how many of us remember to thank God for that? Even when we live in sin and He continues to give us rain and sunshine, how many of us thank Him for the grace? Why should you wait until the day of trouble for you to remember that God exists?

Gratitude can be learned. That is why parents, teachers and mentors need to teach it to their wards from childhood so that when they grow up, they will not depart from it [Prov. 22: 6].

b) *We may be ignorant of the favours*

Sometimes, we are ungrateful because we are ignorant of the favours that God or somebody has done for us. For example, all the time that Balak hired Balaam to curse the people of Israel who were soon to pass through his territory (Moab), the Israelites did not know how God had protected them by making the sorcerer bless rather than curse them [Num. Chaps 22-24]. On arriving in the land of the Moabites, the children of Israel “began to commit harlotry with the women (there)” [Num. 25: 1]. That was how they thanked God for protecting them! They might have behaved differently if they had known in advance what the Lord had done for them before their arrival. That is why we are told to give thanks in everything because that is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us [1 Thes. 5: 18].

c) *We reciprocate to avoid indebtedness to others*

Some of us resent or avoid favours from others because we believe that every favour has strings attached to it. So, as we are receiving with the right hand, we are paying back almost immediately with the left hand. For example, a Syrian general, Naaman, came to Samaria, Israel, to receive healing for his leprosy from the prophet Elisha **2 Kgs 5: 1-9**. After he had been miraculously healed [through dipping himself seven times in the Jordan River in obedience to the word of the prophet], he returned to Elisha and said, “Please, take a gift from your servant” **[10-15]**. It was not a small gift; it included money, clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants **[v. 26]**. But the prophet refused because that was not the time to receive gifts. The general wanted to close the deal as if he had just received medical treatment from a specialist hospital!

Speaking through the Psalmist, God has said, “If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness... *Offer to God thanksgiving* and pay your vows to the Most High... *Whoever offers praises glorifies Me*” **[Ps. 50: 12, 14, 23]**. You cannot buy God off your need to thank Him for the mercies that He shows you each day. After all, what can you reciprocally give back to Him for healing you of incurable diseases or rescuing you from instant death?

d) *We may actually forget to thank others!*

Sometimes, we sincerely want to show gratitude but somehow forget to do so! We may be too busy or too careless. For example, two servants of King Ahasuerus had conspired to take his life. Mordecai knew about it and told his niece, Queen Esther, who immediately passed the information to her husband. An inquiry confirmed the truth of the conspiracy and the two servants were hanged. The matter “was written in the book of the chronicles *in the presence of the king*” **[Esth. 2: 21-23]**. The king did not thank or reward Mordecai until much later, on the night he could not sleep and commanded that the book of the records of the chronicles be read to him **[Esth. 6: 1-3]**. What if Mordecai had died before that night? He might never have received the king’s gratitude for his loyalty.

No matter how busy or forgetful you may be, you never forget to eat or drink! Therefore, you need to develop hunger and thirst for gratitude so that when their pangs hit you, nobody will remind you to offer thanks.

e) *We may be downright ungrateful*

Some people are downright ungrateful! They receive from others and offer not a single word or gesture of gratitude in return. In fact, the next time they are in need, they feel no shame to come back!

Abigail's rich husband, Nabal, is a case in point. While David and his men lived in the wilderness, running from King Saul's persecution, he helped Nabal to protect his flock and servants against foreign invaders. One day, David sent his men to request for food supplies from Nabal. He refused and sent back an insulting response, saying, "Who is David and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?" [1 Sam. 25: 1-11]. But for his smart wife's intervention, David was going to kill him for that!

We can conclude that you have no excuse to be ungrateful to God or to those who have shown you kindness. Instead, you should learn to say 'thank you' as follows:

- With respect to God, make thanksgiving your sacrifice by paying your tithes and vows [Mal. 3: 8-10] and form the habit of thanking or praising Him every moment [1 Thes. 5: 18] or, at least, seven times a day [Ps. 119: 164]. If you think that you have problems, also remember that things could have been worse but for God's grace and mercies.
- With respect to others, stop taking things for granted. Thank your spouse, parents, children, siblings, colleagues, subordinates and fellow workers in the Lord's vineyard. Do not forget strangers because God has used some people that you may never meet face-to-face to contribute to your success in life. As you receive with one hand from others to meet your physical, psychological and spiritual needs, you must use the other hand to meet the needs of *others* [Lk 14: 13-14]. See how many people that Paul thanked in Romans Chapter 16. The list included one Mary "who laboured much for us" [Rom. 16: 6]. That way, you become part of God's value chain and He will reward you even if people do not thank you.

3. Conclusion: Learn from Jesus Himself

Whenever an opportunity presented itself, Jesus thanked His Father and His followers for His own successes. For example, when the disciples that He had sent out to preach, teach and heal came back to report that even the demons were subject to them in the name of Jesus, He said to them, "Do not rejoice ... that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." He also thanked His Father, "the Lord of heaven and earth" for revealing such mysteries to babes [Lk 10: 17-22]. Before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me, and I know that You always hear Me" [Jn 11: 41-42]. Therefore, you have a great deal to learn from Jesus on how to express gratitude.

Now, do you any longer have any excuse for not saying 'thank you'?