

# YOUR G.P.S. LOCATION

Sermon, October 9, 2022

Text: Luke 17:11-19

I think all of us are familiar with the navigation system known as G.P.S., the Global Positioning System. It's a fascinating technical product originally produced for/by the U.S. military. Basically, the G.P.S. is comprised of a constellation of twenty-seven Earth-orbiting satellites (*twenty-four are in operation and there are three extras in case one fails*). Each of these two-ton solar-powered satellites circles above the globe at about twelve thousand miles, making two complete rotations every day. The orbits are geometrically arranged so that at any time, anywhere on Earth, there are at least four satellites "visible" in the sky above. A G.P.S. receiver's job is to locate four or more of these satellites, calculate the distance to each, and use this information to deduce its own location via a mathematical operation called trilateration ... which is beyond my understanding other than I know it works ... and it can then tell you through the magic of Google maps on your phone or your car's navigational device to "turn left in five hundred yards" no matter where you are on Earth. I've read that some of the more advanced receivers are so accurate they can establish a G.P.S. location within one centimeter! (*I need one of those tracking devices for my often-misplaced keys!*)

Note ... it will not do if the G.P.S. receiver decides to ignore one of these four satellites ... they **all** work in conjunction to keep the traveler from getting lost. The receiver has to pay attention to all four visible satellites; they work as a unit. It's not a perfect analogy, but it's the same with God's "navigation system" designed to guide His people through the wilderness journey called life. The Ten Commandments are all part of a whole; one cannot pick and choose which ones to obey or disregard without losing one's way in life to some degree or another. We would do well to know and honor all ten if we would successfully navigate through this journey we call life ... which is what we're discussing at our Thursday dinners, so I hope you can come on out at 5:30 p.m. Thursday! This **Sunday** morning I want to ask, "*What is your G.P.S. location?*" More precisely, "*What is your GratitPosition Stand?" Where do you "stand" on gratitude? We'll be looking at four positions on gratitude in our Gospel reading this morning.*

Luke tells us as Jesus entered a village, He was approached by ten lepers. As required by law, the ten men practiced what we've come to call "social distancing." We know next to nothing about these ten lepers. We don't know their names, jobs, their family histories. We don't know whether they were rich or poor or influential or talented before getting sick. All that has been lost; now they are known only as ten lepers, identified only by what's wrong with them (*something we're prone to do, BTW, but really shouldn't ... all people are unique human beings created in the image of God, and should NOT be identified solely by their afflictions!*). Don't forget these are individuals with names and unique histories and families. In that group of ten afflicted men there has to be someone's husband or son, someone's dad, someone's brother, maybe someone's grandfather. We are told at least one of them was a Samaritan. Normally, Samaritans and Jews would have nothing to do with each other ... unless they happened to contract leprosy. Then nobody cares about background or cultural differences or stations in life ... now they are just carriers quarantined, cut off, from social contact with others, cut off from healthy human contact. They are bonded together in mutual support by their common need, but they had to keep their distance from healthy others (*we all got a taste of that in the "14 days to flatten the curve" that lasted two-plus years, didn't we? It wasn't just the sick and symptomatic who were quarantined; everyone was isolated, which caused all kinds of unforeseen negative consequences ... psychological, mental, medical, social, economical, developmental, educational ... that we're just recently fully realizing. Suffice it to say for now, on one hand, that's water over the "darn," as one of my seminary friends liked to say; on the other, there are sober lessons we must learn from the negative fallout of this unprecedented universal quarantine*). So, FROM A DISTANCE they cried out for pity; they cried out for mercy. This is the first position on gratitude that we see in this text -- STANDING AT A DISTANCE. Those who keep their distance have difficulty being grateful because they have been overwhelmed by something that is literally or figuratively eating away at them.

As I've mentioned when we've looked at this story in past years, this isn't just an old Bible story. Many of us have a little "leprosy" in our lives, something that is just eating away at us, something that may have been quietly eating away at us for quite a while. Maybe it is a private failure, a painful memory, or an addiction or ailment you just don't want people to see, so you try to keep it "covered" ... because, well, you don't want to be expelled from the community. You think if others were to find out about this, they might not want you around. And as you look around, it sure seems like everyone else here is doing OK. Maybe you are feeling more and more like you should keep your distance. Maybe you don't think anybody else would want you around if they knew how "sick" you really were. Please ... **STAY PUT**. You are in the right place! This is where you need to be; this is where we all need to be. Because all of us here are a little bit sick! I say that with affection and with seriousness ... there really is something wrong with every one of us here; that's why we have need of a Savior. That is what binds us together as a community and as a church. But it may be the case that right now your need is so overwhelming that you find it hard to be thankful; so you may be **standing at a distance from gratitude**.

When the lepers saw Jesus, they stood at a distance and called out to Him saying, "*Jesus, Master, have pity on us.*" Jesus' response was to tell them to go show themselves to the priests. Now, according to the law (*Leviticus 13*), the

only reason a leper would show himself to the priests was for the priests to examine him, declare him healed and let him back into the community. But Jesus hasn't healed them yet! He just tells them to get going, to take steps in the direction He gives them. *"And as they went,"* we are told, *"they were cleansed."* It is as if Jesus was telling these sick men to step out and begin acting like people who are going to be healed; to get up and start moving toward wholeness! Don't let this affliction immobilize you! I think there is a principle being exhibited here: Call to Jesus for mercy, then start walking in the direction(s) He gives you! We have a role in our healing, and that role is to take intentional steps in the right direction. Exercise the faith you have; do what He tells you to do, and watch the miraculous happen. Last week while reading from this same chapter in Luke, we heard the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. He responded in so many words that faith did not need to be *increased* so much as it needed to be *put into motion and acted upon*. We see that here ... these ten lepers had just enough faith to get up and take simple steps in the right direction, the direction Jesus told them to go ... and they were healed along the way.

We are told that when one of the ten saw he was healed ... that's a key phrase, by the way ... *"he saw he was healed"* ... he turned back; he returned to give thanks for the grace he received. **This is the second position on gratitude.** Not keeping your distance, but returning to acknowledge, and give thanks to, the Giver. That's what genuine gratitude does: It intentionally draws near and gives thanks to the Giver for the grace that was given. Apparently, if we take this story at face value, approximately nine out of ten people who receive genuine divine blessing just don't do this; they still keep their distance from Jesus. Why is that?

Why did only one man cleansed from leprosy return to thank Jesus? For starters, maybe because (a) *he saw he was healed*; he recognized he really had been cured of a deadly serious affliction, and (b) *he knew Jesus had done it*. Someone made a tongue-in-cheek list of nine possible reasons the other nine did not return; I'll just name a few: Maybe one thought, *"I'm not sure if this cure is genuine, if it is going to last; I'll wait and see if it'll really 'take' before I thank anyone."* Maybe another said, *"Ah, I probably would have gotten better anyway. Maybe I really never had leprosy in the first place! I feel fine now."* Or, *"Harumph. Jesus didn't really DO anything ... except to send us away and refer us to some other religious people."* Or, *"I might have been sick, but I also really need to lose weight ... and I'm still fat. What kind of healer is that? He didn't fix EVERYTHING, there is still too much wrong with me and my world."* Maybe another said, *"Hey, wow, I feel great! I haven't felt this good in ages! I'm going to go out right now to find all my friends and family and have a party! I'll thank Jesus later ... maybe next Easter or Christmas Eve!"*

Giving Jesus thanks ... *genuine* thanks ... apparently is difficult for nine out of ten people. Maybe it's because genuine gratitude is grounded in two main things:: (1) The humble acknowledgement that we were so very much in need (*i.e., really and perhaps grievously afflicted*) in the first place, and (2) the humble acknowledgement that every blessed thing we have in our lives really is from the hand of God. To truly worship is to acknowledge that everything we hold dear ... our health, our families, our work, even our ability to believe and have faith in the first place ... has come from the God Who in Jesus Christ refused to keep His distance from us. This is almost another sermon, but when we really believe that, we then find we are far more patient, far more tolerant, far more compassionate toward others who may not have been as blessed as we. In genuinely recognizing everything you have has been given to you from the hand of a gracious God, you can't help but be patient and gracious with the shortcomings of those who have not been as fortunate to receive what you have received. Suffice it to say for now, there is just no room for smugness in the heart of the truly grateful Christian.

One other point to make: Remember, all ten were healed. They all got to keep their blessed healing, even though nine still kept their distance from Jesus. So, ingratitude doesn't prevent us from receiving *blessings*. Ingratitude prevents us from genuinely receiving *Christ*. If we just grab our blessings and run, that doesn't mean we will lose the blessings. It means something much worse. It means we will miss the **ultimate** blessing of getting to know and serve the Blesser. When the healed leper got to Jesus, he threw himself on the ground at Jesus' feet.

**There is the third position of gratitude.** Prostrate at the feet of the Giver. Bowing at Jesus' feet in humility and gratitude, and awaiting His direction. From this position you can't see much. You certainly can't look down on anyone around you, for you are looking only at the ground and at Jesus' feet. All you can see are the feet of Jesus, which is just the beginning of Him.

Only those who make it to the feet of Jesus are really free. Those who cling to the Blesser, not the blessings. After all, blessings are only loaned to us for a time. Family, children, work, health, home, possessions, money, even life itself, all will have to be returned eventually. We don't get to keep any of that. I guarantee each one of those lepers eventually lost their health again ... look around, they aren't here! Eventually they got sick again and died. We will never be really free until we stop clinging to the blessings we will all eventually lose, and start clinging to the Savior we cannot lose. Jesus told the man at His feet, *"Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well."* Or, as the King James Version translates it, *"Your faith has made you whole."*

**This is the fourth position on gratitude** -- to go your way as a person made well, a person made whole. Jesus is not talking about the healing of this man's body; the man at his feet had already received that. He is talking about a deeper healing. We will never be wholly well apart from faith in Jesus Christ. This is faith not that Jesus will make our dreams happen, but faith in Jesus **no matter** what happens. So much more could be said, but I end with this: When our gratitude is not just in the blessings but in the Blesser, then He truly makes us whole.