

After delivering Israel out of slavery in Egypt, God gave his people a form of worship. He gave them the Ten Commandments. He gave them directions for building a tabernacle with the altar of sacrifice, the Ark of the Covenant, and other holy things. He established a priesthood, anointing Aaron as high priest and consecrating other men from the tribe of Levi to be priests. The priests taught the people God's Law, made sacrifices, and offered prayers for the people. God also inspired David, as well as several priests, to compose songs and Psalms for the people to sing in their worship of the Lord. God wants his people to worship him even to this day. He wants us to call upon his name in the day of trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks. He wants us to sing hymns and Psalms. But of all the acts of worship, the highest worship of God is not the service of the priests. It isn't the sacrifices, the hymns and music, or the praise. It isn't even the prayers of thanksgiving. No, the highest worship of God is faith in his Son.

Jesus teaches us this after healing ten men of their leprosy. He healed all ten of them, but only one came back to Jesus to thank him. And yet, it wasn't the man's thanksgiving that Jesus focuses on. Certainly, this man gave thanks. That is clear. He ran back to Jesus, loudly praising God. He fell down on his face at Jesus' feet and thanked him. Jesus makes note of the fact that this Samaritan gave glory to God. In fact, he says that he was the only one of the ten to do so. This foreigner, who didn't have the temple and the priesthood and the sacrifices, was the only one to come back and glorify God. But it wasn't the man's thanksgiving that Jesus points to. After saying that this Samaritan gave glory to God, Jesus turns to the Samaritan and says, "Get up and go! Your faith has saved you."

You see, faith is the highest glory we can give to God. Trusting in God is giving God all the glory, all the credit, all the merit. It is trusting his words as the words of life, not merely a laundry list of things to do. God counts faith as righteousness in his sight, not because of how virtuous it is in itself, but because of what faith holds onto. Faith lays hold of the sure promise of God in Christ who took our guilt upon himself and made purification for our sins. In other words, faith calls God true. It attributes to God righteousness, salvation, and all good things, even when our eyes can only see evil and hardship.

It is from this faith that all genuine acts of worship follow. All acts of sacrifice, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving freely flow from faith receiving God's free salvation in Jesus Christ. As David sings in Psalm 37, "Trust in the LORD, and do good. Dwell in the land and feed on his faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD. Trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass. He will cause your righteousness to come forth like the light and your justice as the noonday."

Jesus says much more than that this man was healed of his leprosy. He says that the man was saved. He found salvation in Jesus Christ, and this is why he ran back to the Lord. He ran back to the source of his salvation.

Of course, the Samaritan was happy that he was healed. But the other nine were healed as well. All ten of them cried out to Jesus for pity. All ten followed Jesus' instruction to show themselves to the priests to examine them. This was, after all, what God commanded to be done when someone was healed of his leprosy. I'm sure the other nine men were very happy to be healed of such a terrible skin disease, to be reunited with their families and friends, and not shunned by the community. But none of that saved them. Being healed of your leprosy doesn't save you. Going to the priest, offering a sacrifice, and even being happy and rejoicing – these things don't save you. Only faith in Christ saves. In fact, faith the size of a mustard seed is powerful enough to uproot a tree and plant it into the sea.

The Samaritan was set apart from the other nine. This wasn't because he was a foreigner. He had different priests than they did. His religion was different from theirs. But none of that is what set him apart. No, he was set apart by faith. His worship was the true worship, because it rested in the true High Priest, the Son of God, who came to give his own life as a sacrifice for all sinners.

How much did that Samaritan understand this faith? How mature was he? As he bowed down at the feet of Jesus, did he recognize that these very feet would be pierced with nails? Did he grasp how much his Master would have to suffer for him? These things would become more vivid once Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the final time. There he would be arrested, condemned, and whipped. He would carry his own cross up to Mount Calvary right outside the city. He would be lifted up on that cross and die. He would be pierced for our iniquities, fulfilling the very salvation he came to bring for all sinners. Did the Samaritan understand all of that? He likely didn't grasp it all at that moment. And yet, his faith firmly rested in Christ. Did he understand the irony that Jesus told him to show himself to the priest and now he is bowing down before the High Priest himself who makes intercession to the Father for us? Perhaps he didn't quite grasp all that. But his faith, the size of a mustard seed, found salvation in the words of Christ.

How much do we grasp these things? Do we comprehend the full weight of what Jesus did? Do we understand the deep depravity of our sins, and do we appreciate the magnitude of his suffering and death? It's easy to forget how much we need the comfort and assurance that comes from the blood of his cross. How often do we thirst for his body and blood, which he gives us to eat and to drink in the bread and the wine through the words of his testament? The cares and pleasures of this life easily distract us from learning and growing in the knowledge of our crucified and risen Savior. Worship very quickly becomes rote and stale, no more than a going through of the motions. But it's when we have to suffer the torments of body and soul when God wakes us up and stimulates our faith to cling to the only source of salvation and life. When we must face death, when we find no help in earthly comfort, when we see that nothing good dwells within our sinful nature, then God is training us and exercising our faith to cling firmly to Christ's saving words.

That's what happened to this Samaritan. He learned through his own suffering to call out to God and take refuge in his Son. No doubt he would grow to learn more about the significance of what Jesus would accomplish in Jerusalem by his atoning death for all sinners. In the meantime, he held onto Jesus' Word, clinging to the feet of his Savior.

But Jesus told that man to get up and go. Go with this assurance – your faith has saved you. Here Jesus teaches that the worship of God in our daily lives builds on this saving faith. Jesus teaches us to go with this same assurance. Go to your home, to your work, to your daily duties. Love your neighbor, and whatever you are lacking, ask God in Jesus' name, and he will give you the strength to bear whatever cross you must carry. All of this is worship of God, which flows from the certain faith in the words and works of Jesus Christ your Lord. You have been baptized into Christ, declared righteous in God's sight, forgiven of all your sins, and clothed with the garments of salvation. With this confidence, go in the calling and conviction of the Lord. Such worship is pleasing to God because of the faith that God has created in your heart.

When you trust in the words of Christ, then you will begin to see, even if only in part, that his words are true and faithful. You will see, like that Samaritan, how God takes away your diseases and hardships. You will see how God provides for all you need in this life. And even when your physical diseases don't

go away, even when you must face death, even when the temptations of sin and your doubting flesh rise up against you, your faith will not be put to shame. As you go to your daily work, trusting in God's promises and giving thanks to him in the name of Jesus, your faith is always drawn by his Word to return to the source of all goodness and mercy. Your faith continues to cling to its object. Your faith is designed by God look to Jesus Christ alone who did for all the world atone. He is your one Redeemer.

So keep returning to him. Return to hear his gospel, kneel at his feet, eat his body and blood, and receive his gift of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. This is the highest worship of God. It is to trust his promise. So go with this confidence from the very lips of Jesus. Your faith has saved you. Amen.