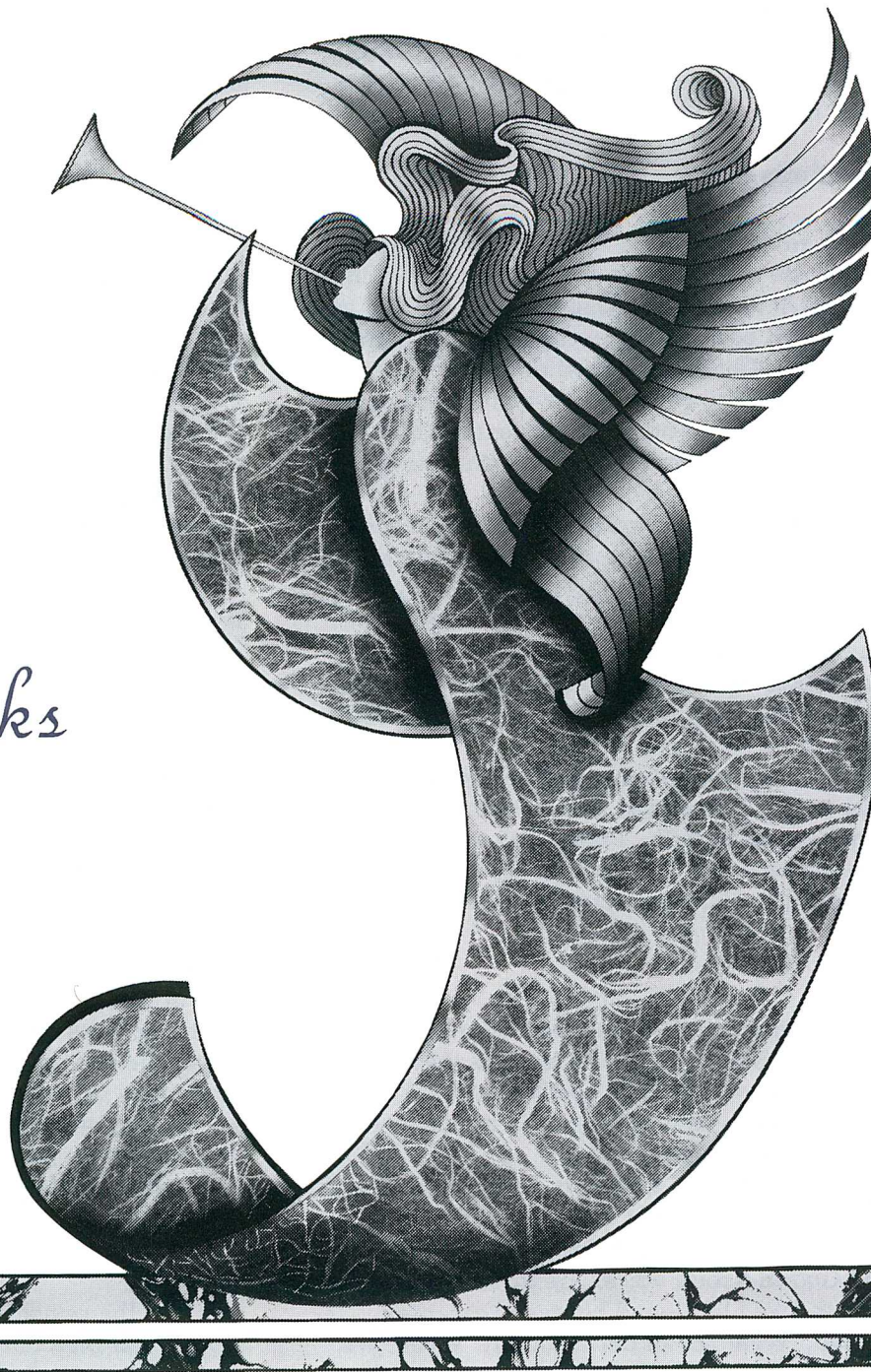


A Tithē of Thanks

by
Desmond Ford



Two angels set out from heaven, each with a basket to bring back the prayers and thanksgiving of those on earth. The angel of thanksgiving started with a large hamper; the collector of petitions with a small basket. When they returned, each was in trouble. The petitions overflowed the small basket and filled a sack as well. But the bottom of the large hamper was not even covered by the three tiny thanksgivings!

thank Jesus. It has always been much easier for all of us to cry "give me" than to give thanks. One of our greatest needs (which if fulfilled will multiply our joy) is the need to think and to thank.

The trouble is, of course, this poor human nature of mine and yours. Our human nature is as crooked as a corkscrew. To say "thank you" is just as difficult for us as to practice giving rather than getting.

many, the other was unhappy because the grapes had seeds. One convalescent man said, "I'm better today," another said, "I was worse yesterday." Watching the rain, one woman said, "This will make mud." Another woman said, "It will lay the dust." Two children looked through colored glasses. "The world is blue," cried one. "It's bright," breathed the other.

Misery is simply a synonym for ingratitude. There is always something to be thankful for each day, even if it's only for what *hasn't* happened. When the class was asked to list what they were thankful for, Drew surprisingly included glasses on his list.

To Think and to Thank

We dare not despise the nine lepers who were cleansed and did not return to

Always Something to be Grateful For

Two boys went out to gather grapes. One was happy because they found so

"Why are you thankful for glasses" asked the teacher. Drew replied, "because the boys won't hit me and the girls won't kiss me."

The Danger of Prosperity

The trouble with most of us is we are too prosperous. We have it too easy. That is what distinguishes us from the Pilgrims of the first Thanksgiving.

Many years ago beehives were carried to Barbados in the West Indies. The bees worked diligently gathering pollen for the coming winter. But when they discovered they were in a land of perpetual summer, they stopped. Instead, they spent most of their time stinging the inhabitants!

That is a parable for our western world. We have spiritual degeneracy. God has surrounded us with so many blessings that instead of working for his glory and for the good of our fellows—like those seven men among the Pilgrims who were healthy enough to tend the sick—we spend most of our time living for ourselves. We thrust the sting when we could more wisely gather the sweetness.

Let us thank God not only for prosperity, but even for the threat to our prosperity. Such threats cast us upon God and lead us to faith. Praise God for the trials and temptations that keep us from sinking into an attitude of self-content (which can destroy the soul).

The Story of the Ten Lepers

"Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As they were 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'" (Lk 17:11-19).

Never be disturbed because people don't say "Thank you." If one in ten thanks you, you are being treated as well as Jesus. He received but 10 percent—a tithe—of thanks.

Faith Works Best by Love

There was some faith in all of the ten lepers. They set off without a word, though as yet they were not cleansed. They set off to see the priests in Jerusalem as they were told. They had a measure of faith and obedience. If their faith had worked by love, all ten would have been given a greater blessing than just a cleansing from physical leprosy. The one trouble with the nine is that they did not love. Or loved the wrong object—self.

Want and hunger can create a faith that gratification kills unless love and gratitude are cherished.

All blessings received are a test of character. True gratitude always involves two things: 1) Humility. The healed leper fell at the feet of Jesus. We remember the pit from whence we are digged when we entertain true gratitude. 2) Exaltation of God. The Samaritan glorified God. If you and I are grateful for the goodness of God, we too will want to be good and thus glorify him.

The Leprosy of Ingratitude

The nine went on their way with their bodies healed but with a more loathsome disease upon them—the leprosy of ingratitude. If we do not give thanks to God, we are no more than cows and pigs and dogs. We are worse. We have spiritual leprosy.

The Miracle's Lesson

Every miracle in Scripture has a lesson, which is why they were recorded. The despised Samaritan who returned is in contrast to the other nine. They were of Christ's own privileged people, the Jews.

They had good reason, a legal reason, not to return. The law demanded that they go to the priest and show themselves. In obedience to that law Christ had ordered them to go. (No doubt, they would also prepare all Jerusalem for Christ's arrival with the story of their healing.)

But sometimes the letter of the law kills, and it is the spirit that gives life. Love needs to overrule acts of Congress. The nine could have come back and thanked Jesus before they went on their lawful way. They held to the law but Christ could say to the one who received grace, "Your faith has made you well." Spiritually, as well as physically, he received the nobler blessing.

Lost by Ingratitude!

Now the punch line. There is only one reason why anyone will miss out on heaven. Not murder, not adultery, not theft, not lying—but ingratitude!

The issue now is the Son question not the sin question. The only reason people will be lost from the kingdom of heaven and eternal life is because they have not appreciated Calvary.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already" (Jn 3:17,18).

People are not lost because of their sins, but because they have not been grateful for Christ. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (Jn 3:36). Think on that. Those who lack the spirit of gratitude for Calvary will lose eternal life. God has something better to give you than even the thousand gifts in which you rejoice from day to day. We need to see Jesus there on the cross for us. That will bring gratitude. And much more than a tithe.