

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?” ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” ¹

Today our scripture gives us another lesson in “Kingdom Living.” We have already learned about our attitude and use of money; and last week we learned that God has given us the faith needed to do the things God asks us to do; as well as our attitude toward service to God. When we have done all that we know to do, we have only done what we ought to do. In today’s scripture Jesus is on his journey toward Jerusalem, but he still has work to do for the people along the way. He came to the border of Samaria and Judea, and encounters 10 men. These men had something in common, they all suffered from a dreaded disease; they were lepers. This was worst than our modern-day swine flu or AIDS. According to Leviticus there was a detailed process by which a person was pronounced to be a leper, and when that label was placed on a person they were excluded from the community, especially in Israel. They had to wear torn clothes, let his or hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out “Unclean! Unclean!” As long as he or she had the infection they remained unclean. He or she had to live alone; outside the camp or community. This meant that the person lived a life of isolation and was not able to associate with family or friends, nor were they able to worship with the people of God. The implication was they had sinned in some terrible way and God was punishing them.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Lk 17:11-19

However, the lepers in our scripture seem to have figured out a way to deal with the isolation. They had banded together as a community of lepers. This particular group seems to have been made up of both Jews and at least one Samaritan. This is shocking because the Jews and Samaritans would not normally live together, but misery loves company and all ten were outcasts. Here is an example of a great law of life. A common misfortune had broken down the racial and national barriers. In the common tragedy of their leprosy they had forgotten they were Jews and Samaritans and remembered only they were men in need. It is said if flood surges over a piece of country and the wild animals congregate for safety on some little bit of higher ground, you will find standing peacefully together animals who are natural enemies and who at any other time would do their best to kill each other. Surely one of the things which should draw all men together is their common need of God. What difference does birth make if you are experiencing a living death?

These men had hope, because Jesus was passing through. They kept their distance, but cried out for mercy. There was no specified distance at which they were instructed to stand, but at least one authority said when he was up-wind of a healthy person, the leper should stand at least fifty yards away. So the lepers lived in utter isolation.

The word the lepers used when calling to Jesus was “master” and is the same one Peter used when he met Jesus. It means “chief commander.” These lepers must have believed that Jesus was totally in command of even disease and death, and they trusted Him to help them.

Jesus commanded the men to go show themselves to the priest, which in itself was an act of faith. At that point they had not been cured. They obeyed, and on their way they were cleansed from the disease and were made ceremonially clean. They were completely healed! It seems in this case their obedience was evidence of their faith.

You would have expected all ten men to run to Jesus and thank Him for a new start in life, but only one did so—and he was not even a Jew. How grateful the men should have been that God brought Jesus into their area, for the love that caused Jesus to pay attention to them and their need, and for the grace and power of God that brought about their healing. They should have formed an impromptu men's chorus and sung Psalm 103 together!

But before we judge them too harshly, what is our own “GQ”—“Gratitude Quotient”? How often do we take our blessings for granted and fail to thank God? Too often we are content to enjoy the gift but we forget the Giver. We are quick to pray but slow to praise.

The next time you sing “Now Thank We All Our God,” try to remember that Martin Rinkhart wrote it during the Thirty Years' War when he conducted as many as forty funerals a day, including that of his own wife; yet he wrote those beautiful words as a table grace for his family. In spite of war and plague around him and sorrow within him, he was able to give thanks to the Lord from a grateful heart.

Luke's account closes with one unusual man. When he discovered he was healed, he returned to thank Jesus. The Samaritan shouted “Glory to God!” and fell at Jesus' feet to praise Him and give thanks. It would have been logical for him to have followed the other men and gone to the temple, but he first came to the Lord Jesus with his sacrifice of praise. But I wonder if he would have been received well in the temple. After all, he was a Samaritan leper. Remember that some rabbis taught the “only good Samaritan was a dead Samaritan.” Would he have been given the same courtesy as the others who would be examined by the chief priest, be quarantined for a week, be reexamined, be quarantined for another week, be examined again and when be pronounced clean after the ritual washing in the blood of a bird, cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop. Then he would be required to bring two male lambs and one female lamb to be offered for guilt and

wave offerings before God. But this man's act of gratitude pleased Jesus more than all the sacrifices the other men offered, even though they were obeying the Law. Instead of going to the priest, the Samaritan came to the real high priest, and brought the offering of praise to the feet of Jesus.

He was praising God and **he** threw himself at Jesus' feet, a posture of worship. We don't know if he understood that Jesus is God, but he placed faith in Him. We don't even know whether or not he understood that Jesus is the Messiah. But by coming to Jesus, the man received something greater than physical healing: he was also saved from his sins. Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you." the same words He spoke to the repentant woman who anointed His feet. The Samaritan's nine friends were declared clean by the priest, but he was declared saved by the Son of God! While it is wonderful to experience the miracle of physical healing, it is even more wonderful to experience the miracle of eternal salvation.

Each of us as children of God should cultivate the grace of gratitude. It not only opens your heart to further blessings but glorifies and pleases God. An unthankful heart is fertile soil for all kinds of sins.²

The lack of gratitude by the other nine was typical of the rejection of Jesus. Jesus alone had the power to cleanse us and make us ceremonially clean. We want to accept the things that Jesus can do like healing and feeding, but don't want to accept Him as Messiah, ruler of our lives.³

No story in all the gospels so clearly shows man's ingratitude. The lepers came to Jesus with desperate longing; Jesus cured them; and nine never came back to give thanks. So often, once a person has got what they want, they never come back.

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 17:11

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:248

1. Often we are ungrateful to our parents. There was a time in our lives when a week's neglect would have killed us. Of all living creatures man requires longest to become able to meet the needs essential to sustain life. There were years when we were dependent on our parents for literally everything. But the day often comes when an aged parent is a nuisance; and many young people are unwilling to repay the debt they owe of mutual care.

2. Often we are ungrateful to others. Few of us have not at some time owed a great deal to another, and we would never believe we could ever forget; but few of us in the end satisfy the debt of gratitude we owe. It often happens that a friend, a teacher, a doctor, a surgeon does something for us which it is impossible to repay; but the tragedy is that we often don't even try to repay it.

3. Often we are ungrateful to God. In some time of great need we pray with desperate urgency and intensity; the time passes and we forget God. Many of us never even offer a grace before we eat. God gave us Jesus and often we never give to God even a word of thanks. We need to learn to give thanks and praise and then live our lives of obedience and service. We should sing daily with the Psalmist (Psalm 103:1-3.)⁴

**Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,**

⁴ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 217