

BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Luke 17:11-19.

This is a well-known event in the New Testament. We teach it often when teaching children about the things that the Lord Jesus did while ministering on earth. Perhaps we were taught it as children if we went to Sunday School. Leprosy in those days was a terrible condition to have. Many people died of it. It was very contagious and so people who had contracted it were required to keep away from everyone else. We have had good news about the possibility of a vaccine for COVID-19 this last week. There was no vaccine for lepers. They had to stand afar off (v12) and were well aware of what it meant to socially distance.

1. Christ's mercy freely available.

Our Lord was traveling here on His way to Jerusalem. He was in non-Jewish country, in Samaria and Galilee (v11). It is while He is in this region that He hears voices crying out to Him. These ten men knew there was no point crying out to anyone else. The Priests and the Levites could not help them. But they believed that this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, could. They had heard He had special power. That power had helped other people who were lepers. They had also heard that He was willing to help people that no-one else cared about.

One of those ten voices was a Samaritan man. Perhaps he knew about the ministry of the Lord in John 4 to the Samaritan people of Sychar. He had also maybe heard of other non-Jewish people that the Lord had healed or otherwise helped. So he is crying out to the Lord in hope too.

Their cry is a cry for mercy (v13). This is the best cry that any of us can make to the Lord. They ask for mercy on 'us'. They saw themselves personally in need of mercy. It was the same of the tax collector in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:13). In this story the Lord told, the tax collector called upon the Lord for mercy. This came true in a more literal sense when the Lord declared the tax collector, Zacchaeus, to have found salvation (Luke 19:9).

We, as sinners, stand in need of mercy if we are ever to enjoy the favour of God. Viewed from the point of view of God's justice, there are no prospects for us. We stand condemned. Neither are there any prospects for us viewed from the point of view of God's holiness. We realize that we are not holy and that we are not able to entertain

hopes of being able to live with the Lord. We have to cry out for mercy, making an appeal that, despite all that we have done wrong and despite all that we are that is wrong, that the Lord might have mercy on us. There will be no mercy to be found on the Day of Judgment for then it will be too late. But we can make an appeal that the One who has the right to condemn us might not implement what we are owed but might spare us. Today is that day to experience the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and we know that is true for we can see the cross and know that the Lord has shown Himself willing to show mercy there. We know we have no rights or entitlement to expect mercy but the cross is the place we look to find the mercy of God and we are to call upon Him there that He might be merciful to us particularly.

2. Thanksgiving is a proper response to mercy.

Salvation is a gift made over to us by someone, God, who did not have to give it. It should, therefore, be a source of wonder to us, if we are Christians, that we have received this gift. We should always ask 'Why me?' Our debt to God was paid at the cross and we now have a debt to pay to God of praise, thanksgiving, and joy. Neither should this simply be based upon what we found to be true in the Lord when we were converted but everything we have learnt about Him ever since we first knew Him. We ought to be giving Him thanks for present, as well as past, mercies. For our Christian life should display a wonderful accumulation of graciously answered prayers, guidance, help, peace, joy, friendships, and experiences.

In fact, we can see that thanksgiving is expected by the Lord (v15). The healed Samaritan man comes and gives thanks with a loud voice and gives glory to God (v18). The Lord does not tell him that he shouldn't have bothered to do this or that it was not being looked for by Him. Rather He pointedly asks, 'what happened to the other nine?' Why weren't they there along with the Samaritan, giving glory to God? Thanksgiving, in the light of who God is and what He has done, is a perfectly rational response. And God is self aware of His goodness and knows that what is offered to Him is not exaggerated or untrue but is properly fitting, given the Person that God is. God expects worship, as we saw in the recent sermon 'Caesar beware'. Such worship is meant to be public, as it was in the situation of this Samaritan man. Such worship to God should not be regarded as a chore or as something dull. We are to mean it and to bring it in faith and with a sincere heart.

3. Where are the nine?

It is a very pointed question the Lord asks in v17. The nine Jewish men should have led the way in coming to testify of the Lord's mercy. But only the Samaritan man had come, despite the handicap of not having the same degree of light and revelation as the Jews. Perhaps the nine Jewish men had been prejudiced in their thinking by the priests that they had gone and shown themselves to. The priests might have poured scorn on the Lord Jesus and offered an alternative explanation as to why the men had been healed.

We can be, as Christians, like the nine. We fail to come and give the Lord the thanks that He is due for the blessings we have received. This is not only in matters to do with our salvation. People are thanking the NHS and key workers. But who gave these men and women the skills that they have? Was it not the Lord? We should be grateful to the Lord for the homes we have, the possessions He has kindly given us, our families, our food, our health. These have all come from the hand of God. We should be grateful for the public worship we are normally free to render to Him and be looking forward to when this latest lockdown will end and we will be able to come back into the House of the Lord. We should be grateful that the building work is continuing and being done by such skillful people.

We should not be part of a 'moan and groan culture' but be ready to be like the Samaritan man, eager to give thanks and not absent from that duty like the nine.