

November 3, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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ONE LEPER MADE WELL Luke 17:11-19

It is good for us to remind ourselves at this point what this book we call Luke's Gospel is about. Luke began the writing with an introduction to the recipient, a fellow named Theophilus. To him Luke wrote, *"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus"* (Luke 1:1-3).

Luke's orderly account told about one of Jesus' first acts in public ministry. He went to the synagogue in His hometown Nazareth on the Sabbath. The synagogue leader handed Jesus the scroll of Isaiah, and Jesus stood and read this from Isaiah 61:1-2: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed"* (Luke 4:18). Then Jesus told the people in the synagogue that Isaiah had prophesied about Him and that He was going to go about the countryside doing exactly what God had promised through Isaiah He would do.

We have discovered in Luke's account that he recorded incident after incident of Jesus showing compassion to the oppressed, setting the captives free, and healing the sick. Jesus' miracles of healing demonstrated two very important traits about Himself. First, the miracles uncovered His compassion for those who are tortured by the effects of sin. Second, the miracles proved He had power over sin because He is God incarnate. The first of those traits ingratiated the

suffering, needy crowds to Jesus so that masses followed Him wherever He went. The second trait infuriated the religious leaders who refused to accept Jesus' divinity.

Our text finds us in the midst of Luke's account of Jesus making His last trip to Jerusalem. The story began in 9:51 where Luke wrote the transition, *When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem* (Luke 9:51). Picture the geographical journey as Jesus, the twelve apostles, and a varied number of disciples moved slowly from town to town to the final destination, Jerusalem, where Jesus of Nazareth would offer His own blood as the covering for sin.

He **would** not do that unless He has compassion for victims enslaved to sin. He **could** not do that unless He is sinless God. That is Luke's story in the last half of his book. Over and over Luke described how Jesus proved that He was God in the flesh with the power to heal. This is the fourth of five miracles Luke included during this journey to Jerusalem. Over and over Luke recorded the many lessons Jesus taught about what constitutes true righteousness. Over and over we learn that we must have Christ's righteousness in order to enter into heaven.

The story of Jesus healing ten lepers fits all of those models. It is a story about Jesus demonstrating compassion as He mercifully heals ten victims of the effects of sin. But more than a story of physical healing that proves Jesus' divine nature, this is a story that illustrates Jesus' power to restore broken sinners to the righteous image God originally created. The victims of sin's effect had to acknowledge their need. The Savior was the only one who could dismiss the effect. The restored victims should have been thankful. One was. He alone from the ten also received the more important spiritual healing and restoration that placed Him in right standing with His Creator.

The Afflicted Need Mercy (vv.11-13).

Luke's account of Jesus' ministry at this point reminds us that needy people are often found in inhospitable places (vv.11-12). Some places are inhospitable because they are rank with prejudice and bigotry. And prejudice will always stifle concern for others. That was

probably the setting in which we find Jesus, *On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee (v.11)*.

We have read how, along the way, Jesus has dealt with the incessant resistance of the scribes and Pharisees who wrote the rules Jesus refused to keep. He was now passing along the border between Samaria and Galilee. That was an especially hot button for the scribes and Pharisees. The Samaritans were a mixed-race people group. In previous years, some of the Jews who were supposed to maintain racial and ethnic “purity” had become mixed with Gentiles who had no pure line. As a result, the Jews hated the Samaritans for intermarrying and interbreeding with Gentiles. At the same time, the Samaritans hated the Jews for being proud, bigoted, and arrogant.

And in this case, maybe everyone despised the Galileans, holding the opinion that they were just backwoods hillbillies who probably didn’t know much about God or care to know. In that setting, Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, the capital of bigotry, home of the Sanhedrin who personified self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Frankly, it would have been difficult for me to show any genuine concern for the whole lot of them. But then, isn’t that a fair cross section of our culture? Because our culture is thoroughly pagan, arrogant, and sometimes self-righteous, it is easy for us to conclude they will get what they deserve. But our Lord expects us to represent Him and offer the Good News in the same kind of world in which He ministered. Yes, our world is totally messed up; and yes, we need to show concern for them.

Not only does sectarianism and prejudice create an inhospitable environment, but also physical affliction stifles concern. *And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance (v.12)*. Worse than the pagan character of the people along the Samaritan border is the ten guys Jesus ran into along the way. As Jesus walked into an unnamed village, He was greeted by ten lepers. That would be just about the worse kind of greeting we could image. No doubt the people of the village were embarrassed that the “welcome wagon” for this sometimes very popular Teacher was the town outcasts.

At least the lepers had the common courtesy to stay at a safe distance. They were required by law to do so. The law forbid lepers

to come within six feet of a non-leprous person or stay back 150 feet if the wind was blowing. The Mosaic Law also required them to cover their upper lip and cry out, “Unclean” if anyone came near them (Lev. 13:45). It was a horribly anti-social condition. The person who contracted this disease was required to stay outside the city walls until it passed, no matter how important he or she was. When God cursed Miriam with leprosy, she had to stay outside the camp for a week (Num. 12:15).

As a result of this stigma, most people, other than friends or relatives, were unconcerned for lepers. The disease is a good illustration of the infecting nature of sin. We are all born with spiritual infection because of the sin nature. We are cast out of God’s presence. And there is no cure for the condition from human or natural sources. Who will be concerned for us? Fellow sinners, like fellow lepers, are just fine with fellowship. Yes, but what about God our Creator to whom we must give an account?

Granted, it is bad to be so afflicted. However, at the same time, it is good for the afflicted to see their need (v.13). When the afflicted realize how afflicted they are, they might cry out to Jesus. The Lord desires to hear the cry of the afflicted. So these lepers *lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” (v.13)*.

We might wonder if this was a cry acknowledging Jesus as their rightful master, an admission of faith. The rest of the story indicates that the correct answer to that question is, “No.” Rather, this reference to Jesus as Master was simply an acknowledgment that Jesus was a person of high status, a leader of some kind. It was a term of respect. Some English translations translate the word “Teacher” which is how everyone saw Jesus. Only Luke uses the term and of the six uses this is the only time someone other than the disciples called Jesus “Master.” Therefore, the term is more likely a desperate cry for help hoping this teacher who had a reputation for healing miracles would help them.

Stop to consider what this cry for mercy requested. To have mercy is to show kindness and concern for someone who is in serious need. The New Testament concept of mercy flows from God’s demonstration of mercy in the Old Testament. God showed deep compassion for people who actually deserved judgment or retribution.

Yet, God historically responded to the needy with the emotion of faithful compassion. He showed it to the righteous, the upright, those who fear Him. He also showed mercy to the wicked and unrighteous, yeah, to the human race in general. God's common grace is truly rooted in God's mercy.

However, God's mercy is more than sympathy because He understands what we are made of better than we do. Christine Wicker, wrote about F.D.R.'s struggles with polio throughout his adult life. She wrote, "He certainly had sympathy for the less fortunate before polio and may have truly wanted to help them, but sympathy is not experience. Being brought so low took him into realms of loss and helplessness that can't be understood unless they are experienced. He might have talked about the interdependence of humanity before polio; after polio he experienced it every day." (Christine Wicker, *The Simple Faith of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, Smithsonian Books, 2017,48)

And Jesus who was tempted in every way like we are but never sinned is the perfect Master for us to cry out to for mercy. He is more than sympathetic. He is experienced.

The Restored Should be Thankful (vv.14-16).

Ten lepers cried out for mercy, and the Savior commanded restoration. His command flows from the compassion He has for the afflicted. *When he saw them he said to them (v.14a)*. Jesus looked on them not just to notice but with perception. Because Jesus is divine, He didn't need introduction to these afflicted men. He already knew who they were. He knew the plight of their physical condition. He knew their spiritual need far better than they could imagine. He perfectly assessed their motives for crying for mercy.

That is how Jesus sees us. We can fool the people around us making them think we are doing fine. We can even deceive ourselves because our hearts are naturally deceptive. But we can never deceive Jesus. He knows the sincerity of our heart when we cry for His mercy.

And despite knowing that we often beg for help with impure motives, Jesus commands healing. He commanded the lepers, "*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*" *And as they went they were*

cleansed (v.14b). In this command, Jesus referred the needy lepers to the Levitical priesthood. It was still functioning at that time pretty much according to the requirements of the Mosaic Law (Lev. 13-14). It was the high priest's responsibility to inspect someone suspected of leprosy and to judge them diseased if such was the case (Lev. 13). It was the high priest's responsibility to inspect the so-called healed leper and declare the person restored (Lev. 14).

A leper didn't go to the priest to be pronounced "clean" until after he was free of the disease. Therefore, Jesus sending them to the priest implied they would be cleansed before they arrived. Jesus could have spoken a word and healed the lepers on the spot. Also, by sending them to the high priest, Jesus gave the lepers opportunity to display their faith—which we discover only one did. And by sending them to the temple precincts, Jesus gave the priests in Jerusalem (the people who most vehemently rejected Jesus) opportunity to believe that the man who could cleanse ten lepers must be God's Son. Those self-righteous religionists would have the distinct privilege to be looking at the evidence of Jesus' divinity for eight days (the required period between two high priestly inspections).

Restoration generates gratitude (vv.15-16). Luke's story reveals the principle that a restored person can see the results. *Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed (v.15a)*. It became obvious to one of the lepers that he had received the Master's mercy. Of course, the same had to be true for the other nine restored lepers. But they reacted differently.

This same principle is true for any of us who experience the Master's mercy in drawing us to Himself. For example, why do you become cognizant of sin in your life? Why does sin plague your conscience? Why did you one day come to the unwavering conclusion that you had sinned against God and would need to answer for offending Him? Those changes, those new feelings and conclusions are evidence that God is drawing you to the Son where you will find forgiveness for your sins.

When the afflicted person discovers that he has been restored by God's mercy, that restored person is thankful to the restorer. The one leper *turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks (vv.15b-16a)*. One lone leper from among the ten turned back. His physical turning around and

going back to Jesus is a beautiful picture of repentance. To repent is to change our mind, to live in a different direction. To repent is to stop chasing after sin, to turn around and chase after Jesus. So, too, this leper's turning back is a good indication that this leper suddenly came to experience God as his Savior not just the healer of his physical need.

He demonstrated that he experienced the same faith that Old Testament saints exercised before Christ died on the cross. He was like Job who expressed confidently, "*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth*" (Job 19:25). The leper was like David who experienced God as His redeemer from sin and wrote, "*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer*" (Psalm 19:14). He had faith like Abraham about whom Old Testament Scripture says, "*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness*" (Romans 4:3).

The redeemed man praised God with a loud voice. His *loud voice* conveyed the deep emotion of understanding sins forgiven. He would have been criticized in a lot of churches today for becoming too fleshly. *Falling on his face* was an act of worship proving He recognized Jesus' deity, that He is the promised Savior/Redeemer.

The restored man also *gave thanks*. Sadly, we publicly give thanks only during Thanksgiving. Being good Americans, we are more likely to ask God for what we don't have than to thank God for what He has already given. Sometimes we forget the admonition to, *Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble* (Psalm 107:2).

Furthermore, the story reminds us that the restored person knows the depth of mercy. *Now he was a Samaritan* (v.16b). Imagine the unacceptability of a Samaritan going to the Jewish priest, most likely in Jerusalem! Jesus showed great mercy to restore the leper. Greater still was His mercy on a man who was a religious outcast according to the people who thought they were "acceptable" to God. And we who Jesus found enjoying our offenses against Him should know that same depth of mercy.

Questions About Restoration (vv.17-19).

Jesus asked the restored leper some pertinent questions (vv.17-18). Like, "Why were the restored people not thankful?" *Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"* (v.17). The first question is rhetorical expecting a positive answer that could be translated to read, "*Ten were cleansed, right?*" The second rhetorical question highlighted the fact that only one returned. It should be translated, "*But the nine are where?*"

The answer to both questions is that the other nine physically healed men were presumably hurrying on their way to get the priest's approval. The priest's approval would have so many advantages, like getting them back into the mainstream of society—which is passing away. Trusting in traditions connected with their lineage, the Jews were content to fit into man's approval rather than thank God for cleansing. The real problem was that those other nine Jewish lepers who Jesus restored had no true understanding of their personal sin. They had no true sense of the need for forgiveness, no true confession or repentance, no need of the Savior in their opinion. And so it appears that they completed their lives enjoying God's physical blessing, then died, and joined the rich man in Hades. Such is the story for most of the people we know.

In vivid contrast to religious people who should have responded differently, the least likely person praised God. Jesus then offered a general question to the people at large, "*Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?*" (v.18). Jesus rightly called the man a foreigner. He was racially and politically not a Jew. He was a stranger to the Law of God, the promises of God, the covenants of God. He, like all of us, was outside the fellowship with God because of His sins. But this man was no stranger to the mercy of God to forgive sin. The foreigner received God's mercy unto salvation. The stranger became part of God's family.

Jesus asked some rhetorical questions and, based on verse nineteen, we might ask an important question. Was only one leper actually restored? Jesus *said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well"* (v.19). It seems quite likely that once the other nine lepers experienced *cleansing* (v.14), they did not experience a physical reversal because of their lack of gratitude.

This is a typical picture of all the sinners and religious people in the world who enjoy God's common grace without ever acknowledging the source of that grace. But the Samaritan experienced something far greater than physical healing. In verse 14 as the lepers were making their way to the priest, they were cleansed. The Greek word translated cleanse is *katharizo* which means to be cleansed, made clean, or pronounced clean by the priest. It was physical cleansing. In verse fifteen, we read that the Samaritan leper saw that he was healed. Here the Greek word for healed is *eeaoimi*, which means to make whole or cure.

But coming to verse 17, Jesus stated that the Samaritan leper's *faith made him well*. The word for well is the Greek word *sozo*, which means to save, keep safe, or rescue. This is the typical word used in the New Testament to describe eternal salvation from sin's penalty. It means that this one leper (in contrast to the other nine) was born again by faith. That is the lesson of the well-known passage in Ephesians. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)*. The man was not only restored to sound physical health, but more importantly he was restored to right fellowship with his Creator.

In conclusion, we must ask a pertinent question of ourselves. If thankfulness is the sign of restoration, are you restored? Are we only cognizant of our spiritual restoration during Thanksgiving week? How often do feelings of thankfulness well up in our souls? When was the last time you told someone how thankful you are that Christ was merciful to you and gave you faith to believe Him unto eternal life?