

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers**

*Luke 17:11-19*

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# Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

## Scripture

Roy Larson thought the most difficult part of his day would be maneuvering the unfamiliar stick shift on a “loaner” electric wheelchair as he ventured into downtown Glen Ellyn, Illinois, for a haircut.

But his day was about to become much more difficult.

As he was crossing the railroad tracks on Main Street, one of the chair’s wheels became lodged in the track. As Larson struggled to free the wheel, something went wrong with the chair’s electrical system, and the chair refused to move.

Suddenly the lights began to flash, and the signal bells started to ring. The gates in front of Larson and behind him began to lower.

The first person Larson saw as he frantically looked for help was Mark Bade. Bade had been running an errand when he saw that Larson was in trouble. He sprinted to Larson’s side and began to struggle with the chair.

At almost the same moment, Don Burgeson had stopped his car at the gates and saw what was happening. He jumped out of his car and helped Bade wrench the chair free from the track and drag it out of harm’s way.

The three men looked up, just in time to see the train was less than 20 yards away.

“After the train went by, I just said thanks,” Larson said. “The only reason I am here today is because these two guys saved my life.”

Jesus Christ came to save our lives. We also need to say thanks.<sup>1</sup>

In the miracle of Jesus healing ten lepers we notice that

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Cindy Urrea, “Instant Action, Instant Heroes,” *The Sun* (9-28-01).

one of them did return to say thanks to Jesus. But what we learn is that he experienced far more than just healing of his body. He in fact experienced the salvation of his soul as well!

Let's read about Jesus cleansing ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19:

**<sup>11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance <sup>13</sup> and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." <sup>14</sup> When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; <sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:11-19)**

## **Introduction**

In today's text Luke noted that Jesus was "on the way to Jerusalem" (Luke 17:11a). In fact, Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" back in Luke 9:51. While on his way to Jerusalem, Luke recorded Jesus performing five miracles (11:14; 13:12; 14:4; 17:14; 18:35). This is the fourth of five miracles. What is significant about each miracle is the teaching that follows.

In the fourth miracle, Jesus healed ten lepers. One of them returned to Jesus to give praise to God and thanks to Jesus.

## **Lesson**

The healing of ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19 shows us two signs of saving faith.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Request of the Ten (17:11-14)
2. The Return of the One (17:15-19)

## I. **The Request of the Ten (17:11-14)**

First, let's look at the request of the ten.

### A. *The Circumstances (17:11-12)*

Let's begin by observing the circumstances.

Luke said in verse 11 that while Jesus was **on the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee**. Galilee was in the north, and Judea, with Jerusalem as its capitol, was in the south. Sandwiched between Galilee and Judea was the region of Samaria. The people of Samaria - Samaritans - were a mixed race of Jews and Assyrians. The Jews had no dealings with Samaritans (cf. John 4:9), and they would go out of their way so as not to travel through Samaria.

This was not true of Jesus. We remember his well-known encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria. Also, one of Jesus' best-known parables was about a Good Samaritan. Jesus loved all people, including Samaritans.

Luke said that as Jesus **entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance** (17:12). The Mosaic Law forbade **lepers** to get close to anyone (Leviticus 13:45-46; Numbers 5:2-3). That is why they **stood at a distance**.

Leprosy was a dreaded disease in ancient times. John MacArthur has the following description of leprosy:

Like its Old Testament counterpart *lepras* (leprosy) is a general term for a number of skin conditions. The most severe of those was Hansen's disease, which is leprosy as it is known today. . . .

Leprosy, or Hansen's disease, is known from ancient

writings (c. 600 B.C.) from China, India, and Egypt, and from mummified remains from Egypt. It was common enough in Israel to warrant extensive regulation in the Mosaic Law of those suffering from it and related skin diseases (Lev. 13–14). The disease is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae*, discovered by the Norwegian scientist G. H. A. Hansen in 1873 (it was the first bacterium to be identified as the cause of a human disease). The bacterium was communicable through touch and breath.

Leprosy attacks the skin, peripheral nerves (especially near the wrists, elbows, and knees), and mucus membrane. It forms lesions on the skin, and can disfigure the face by collapsing the nose and causing folding of the skin (leading some to call it “lion’s disease” due to the resulting lion-like appearance of the face). Contrary to popular belief, leprosy does not eat away the flesh. Due to the loss of feeling (especially in the hands and feet), people with the disease wear away their extremities and faces unknowingly. The horrible disfigurement caused by leprosy made it greatly feared, and caused lepers to be outcasts, cut off from all healthy society, for protection.<sup>2</sup>

These poor **lepers** were social outcasts. They were cut off from their families, from society, and from worship. They were in a most pitiable condition.

*B. The Cry (17:13)*

Second, observe the cry.

It is likely that the ten lepers had heard about Jesus. They had heard marvelous stories of the countless number of people he had healed. So, when they heard that Jesus was in their vicinity, they went to him and **lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”** (17:13).

Kent Hughes paints the following picture for us:

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<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 313.

On the outskirts of an unnamed village on the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee, ten leprous men stood before Jesus in various stages of decay, their clothing torn in perpetual mourning, their skeletal heads uncovered, their lips unveiled as they warned others, “Unclean, unclean!” (cf. Leviticus 13:45; Numbers 5:2; 12:10–12).

They looked as though they had climbed out of the graves. But they were alive, sensitive human beings, feeling souls living in the nether world of society’s fringe while they rotted away. So from a safe distance they shouted the traditional plea, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (v. 13). They were loud and persistent. “Have mercy on us!” “Master, have mercy!” “Mercy please!”<sup>3</sup>

The important point to note here is that Jesus is the right one who is able to answer every need. When we have any need, we should take it to Jesus, just as the ten lepers did.

### C. *The Command (17:14a)*

Third, look at the command.

Jesus, ever merciful, responded immediately to their cry for help. But, this time he did not touch the lepers. Nor did he announce healing, as he had done previously (in Luke 5:13). **When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests”** (17:14a). Jesus commanded the ten lepers to do what a *cleansed leper* would do, namely, to show themselves to the priests, as required by the Law (Leviticus 14). If they were cleansed of their leprosy, they would joyfully undergo the required eight-day ceremony, and then be reunited with their families, society, and worshiping community.

Jesus’ command is interesting. At this point, the lepers

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 170.

were not yet healed. They must have looked at themselves and saw that they still had leprosy. What would they do?

*D. The Cleansing (17:14b)*

And fourth, observe the cleansing.

Luke simply noted in verse 14b that **as they went they were cleansed**. They were healed! I love Bishop J. C. Ryle's comment. He said, "Help meets men in the path of obedience."<sup>4</sup>

I wonder how often God does not work in our lives because we are not walking in the path of obedience? We struggle because we think of God as a genie. He is there to do for us what we want and when we want. However, as J. C. Ryle went on to say,

If the lepers had acted in this way, they would never have been healed. We must read the Scriptures diligently. We must try to pray. We must attend on the public means of grace. All these are duties which Christ requires at our hands, and to which, if we love life, we must attend, without asking vain and captious questions. It is just in the path of unhesitating obedience that Christ will meet and bless us.<sup>5</sup>

## **II. The Return of the One (17:15-19)**

And second, notice the return of the one.

*A. Why He Came (17:15-16a)*

First, look at why he came.

There are two reasons why the leper, now cleansed of his horrific disease, returned to Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 233.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 233.

1. To Praise the Father (17:15)

First, he came to praise the Father.

Luke said in verse 15 that **one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.** Only one of the ten returned to praise God the Father.

R. C. Sproul makes an interesting comment about this healing, “The interpretation that I have heard again and again is that although Jesus healed ten lepers, only one of them was grateful. I don’t believe that for one moment.”<sup>6</sup> He continues,

If we have any understanding what a leper went through, we would know that not even the most corrupt and crass sinner could fail to be grateful for healing. When these lepers saw that their flesh had been restored, that this marvelous healer, Jesus, had done his work, no doubt they began leaping for joy and couldn’t wait to go home to be reunited with their families. . . . That would be the normal thing to do. So nine out of ten went straight home.<sup>7</sup>

But one of the ten healed lepers delayed going to the priest to rush back to Jesus. His meeting with the priest could wait while he fulfilled a deep desire to praise God for his healing. His spiritual desire took priority over his ceremonial duty.

2. To Thank the Son (17:16a)

And second, he came to thank the Son.

Luke said in verse 16a that **he fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving him thanks.**

Notice that he prostrated himself before Jesus: **he fell on**

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<sup>6</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 324.

<sup>7</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke*, 325.



**his face at Jesus' feet.** Kent Hughes notes, "At the very least, he recognized Jesus as an agent of God. More likely, he realized that Jesus was king."<sup>8</sup>

G. K. Chesterton once said, "The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank. The converse of this proposition is also true. . . . The great saint may be said to mix all his thoughts with thanks. All goods look better when they look like gifts."<sup>9</sup>

*B. Who He Was (17:16b)*

Second, notice who he was.

The astonishing thing about this healed leper is that **he was a Samaritan** (17:16b). I have already noted that Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. The two ethnic groups did not get along with each other at all. And yet, the Samaritan, and not the other nine who were presumably Jews, returned to praise God and thank Jesus for his healing.

The lesson here is that Jesus makes no ethnic distinctions between people. He was equally willing to heal Jews as he was to heal Gentiles. And Jesus still deals today with people from every ethnic group.

*C. What He Found (17-19)*

And third, look at what he found.

1. The Sadness of Jesus (17:17-18)

First, he found the sadness of Jesus.

Jesus asked three questions, all filled with sadness, in verses 17-18, "**Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?**

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<sup>8</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 171.

<sup>9</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Image Books, 1957), 78.

**Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”**

At one level we understand that the nine were so glad to be healed that they went at once to the priests to begin the ceremonial process of being declared healed so that they could return to their families. However, as Kent Hughes notes,

There is a deadly problem here – God was not the center of their gratitude. . . . Only the foreigner, the Samaritan, gave praise to God! The other nine were so earthbound, so like the shrewd manager and the rich man of the preceding parables, that they missed the spiritual dimension altogether. Vague gratitude to divinity was not an adequate response to what had happened. Christ wanted their hearts! By failing to glorify God and returning to thank Jesus, they missed the greatest possible moment of their existence.<sup>10</sup>

Vance Havner said the following regarding ingratitude:

Our biggest problem in the church today is this vast majority of Sunday morning Christians who claim to have known the Master’s cure and who return not [at other times] to thank Him by presence, prayer, testimony and support of His church. In fact, the whole Christian life is one big “Thank You,” the living expression of our gratitude to God for His goodness. But we take Him for granted and what we take for granted we never take seriously.<sup>11</sup>

2. The Salvation from Jesus (17:19)

And second, he found salvation from Jesus.

Jesus **said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well”** (17:19). The second part of the verse is literally, “Your faith has saved you.”

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<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 172.

<sup>11</sup> Vance Havner, *The Vance Havner Quote Book in Christianity Today*, Vol. 31, no. 17.

Kent Hughes says, “Jesus’ words were clear: only the Samaritan who returned to praise God and offer thanksgiving to Christ himself had saving faith. Indeed, his gratitude and praise to God were signs of his saving faith.”<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the healing of ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19, we should praise God and give thanks to Jesus for our salvation.

Luke is not teaching that salvation is granted to those who have a thankful attitude. Rather, he is teaching that two signs of saving faith are praise to God and thanks to Jesus.

The great nineteenth century preacher Charles Spurgeon was sharing the gospel with a very talkative woman who was beginning to understand the good news when she burst out: “Oh Mr. Spurgeon, if Christ saves me he will never hear the end of it!” She spoke beyond her understanding, because such praise will be the eternal occupation of the redeemed.<sup>13</sup>

Has God saved you through the person and work of Jesus Christ? If so, then give praise to God and thanks to Jesus for his work of salvation in your life. Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 172.

<sup>13</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 173–174.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

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**PRAYER:**

Our Father, Jesus Christ came into this world to seek and to save the lost. Many of us here today testify to his saving work in our lives. We know that we are saved by your grace and Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection.

May our own lives overflow with praise to you and gratitude to Jesus for our salvation. May we be marked as men and women, boys and girls who never stop praising you and thanking Jesus for saving our souls.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!