

## **The Thankful Samaritan**

November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013

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.""*

In studying this passage, I was drawn to the response of the one leper who returned to Jesus: "<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." That response thrills the heart of Jesus, and he commends his faith. This is what true faith looks like: reverent, humble, thankful worship. Wouldn't you like to live like this?!

### **A Depressed, Entitled Society**

All too often that's not what I see in my own heart, and it's not what I see when I look around at our society, or in the church. We're a very entitled people, and from that arises self-pity, bitterness, complaining, etc. This tenth leper seems to be living in an entirely different world than that. His attitude made me think of a short blog post by John Piper made this land on me. He wrote:

*Thursday in Minneapolis it was so gorgeous walking home I thought: I should write a post on how astonishing it is that no earthquake swallowed up this city today.*

*Instead God sent warmth and crystal skies and cool breezes and golden leaves and hanging sea gulls over Elliot Park.*

*Amazing. Absolutely amazing!*

*We deserved the 52-story IDS tower to fall, and bridges to collapse, and poisonous gas to kill thousands. But instead God gave us over-the-top foretastes of heaven.*

*This is why everyone is crying out, Where was God on Thursday! Where were you God! How could you do this? Why did you let this happen?*

*Everybody is saying that, aren't they?*

Everybody is *not* saying that, because we are a depressed and entitled people. And a sense of entitlement does not give birth to humble, reverent, thankful worship. So I simply want to ask today, what is his secret? How did he get there, because I long to dwell there! And as I look at this text, it seems that there are two things going on that lead to this reverent, humble, thankful, worship response: first, there is a desperate condition, and then secondly, a dramatic cleansing.

### **The Leper's Desperate Condition**

Now there are two parts of this man's plight that we need to consider in order to understand the desperate condition he was in. First, he was a leper: " <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..." We need to understand a little about the condition of leprosy to understand the magnitude of this plight. It was absolute agony, physically, psychologically, spiritually. It was a living hell.

Let me just tell you a little bit about leprosy without going into unnecessary detail (you can do a google image search yourself if you want to be repulsed by the physical effects). This severe type of leprosy is caused by a bacteria. It attacks the nerves and the skin. It numbs the body and the limbs so that feeling is lost. And then the potential for serious injury becomes large. For thousands of years people thought this disease caused the ulcers on hands and feet and face which eventually led to rotting flesh and loss of limbs.

Basically people destroy their own limbs. Paul Brand tells a story of one victim, who each morning would wash his face with a hot washcloth. But neither his hands nor his face were sensitive enough to temperature to warn him that he was using scalding water, gradually destroyed his eyes. That's how it worked. It could be easily transmitted by inhalation or bodily contact or even contact with the clothing.

And that's what led to the other dimension of agony involved in this condition, complete separation from the community. And if it is discovered that you have that communicable disease called leprosy that's so horrific, you were then removed from all social contact and the only people you could ever associate with were other lepers. The people you needed most, the loving family and friends, you couldn't come near. You couldn't associate with other people in the synagogue or any social environment whatsoever. If you were out, you had to stand at a distance, yelling out, "Unclean, unclean!" You were an alien for all of life and left only with others in your same horrific misery.

### **A Leper, *and* a Samaritan**

So these were the most miserable of all people, believing that they had been cursed by God, and shunned by man as well. But as desperate as that condition is, there is more. I had to press at this because all ten men were in this desperate condition of leprosy, and all were begging Jesus for mercy, and all heeded his word to go to the priests, and all experienced this dramatic cleansing (which we'll talk about), but only one came back, only one was commended for his faith. So what was unique about him?

Luke tells us there was an added element to his condition, and maybe it was this that propelled this man back to Jesus in reverent, humble, grateful worship. Luke tells us he was a Samaritan (v.16). Jesus refers to him as "a foreigner" (v.18). Jews absolutely despised Samaritans, they were viewed as sell-outs because during the Jewish exile, they

intermarried with Gentiles and abandoned the Jewish religion. So they were seen as traitors, and every day in the temple Jews prayed that God would smite the Samaritans. So this is a man who was not only in an agonizing condition, but one who knew he had no claim on any blessing from Israel's God. He was an enemy, a traitor, an outcast, unclean. Desperate as he was, he knew he *deserved* nothing.

Can you see yourself, spiritually, in this portrait? If not, you'll never experience the sort of reverent, humble, grateful worship that he experienced. Sin is like spiritual leprosy, deadening your spiritual senses so that you rip your soul to shreds and don't even feel it (that's what gives birth to the idea of, "If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad"). And sin makes us aliens, foreigners, enemies of God, who is too holy and pure and righteous to dwell with us in our sin. I have a "Gospel Primer" that I try to rehearse regularly, and the first point says, "I believe I was an enemy of God because of my sin and rebellion against him, deserving his wrath."

Now where is proud entitlement, where is the "God, how could you do this to me?" mentality, when you understand this to be your condition before God? The gospel says you are not nearly as much a victim as you think. There's an assumption underneath all that anger. You take that assumption away and the anger collapses. You assume God owes you a good life. Would you give me the evidence for that? Give me the evidence that God owes you a really good life. If you pull that out and put in there that you're a rebellious, unclean, estranged enemy of God who deserves to be burning in hell right now, you wouldn't be nearly as angry as you are, no matter how bad you have it!

*"<sup>11</sup>Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh...were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."*

## The Dramatic Cleansing

And that brings us to the dramatic cleansing that this healing miracle depicts: "14When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed." The priests were like the public health inspectors of the society, determining when the disease was healed and when the victim could return to his community. So in commanding them to go the priests, Jesus is announcing that they will be clean. He was commanding them to act like cleansed lepers, and in doing so He was answering their cry for mercy by cleansing them of their pollution.

This is a picture of the dramatic cleansing that you and I need from the filth and pollution of our spiritually leprous condition. The passage begins with Jesus, "On the way to Jerusalem..." by which Luke is drawing our attention to Jesus' deliberate movement towards His own death on the cross (cf. 9:51). On the cross, Jesus is taking the place of sinners, He is becoming sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He is being made to suffer as the most grotesque, hideous object in the whole history of the world, because your greed, lust, coveting, anger, pride, gossip, is so disgusting in God's sight.

And He is doing this all, so that you might be declared clean: "9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Do you see how much there is to be reverent, humble, grateful and worshipping for? As Jack Miller has said, "Cheer up! You're a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you're more loved than you ever dared hope." I bet there were moments this tenth leper forgot...ten, twenty years down the road. He probably had lousy days, where he questioned God's goodness or wisdom or love or power. What he needed, and what you and I need, is someone to say, "Remember what you were, and what Jesus did!"

This is what we do when we take the Lord's Supper; we eat and drink *in remembrance* of Him. You're looking at the broken bread and the

juice and saying, "This is what cleansed me." Look at Jesus, broken to pieces, leprous, a wreck. What is a leper? A leper was someone who had a disease and he or she was falling apart. Jesus was broken to pieces so you could be whole. Jesus was treated like a hated, outcast, enemy, so that you could be brought near and know the warmth of God's loving embrace. He owes you nothing, but in Christ He has made you an heir of everything. God, how could you do this to us? Cheer up! Look at this mercy, and fall down in humble, reverent, grateful worship for all the extravagant, blood-bought mercies of God.