

Study Notes for LUKE 17:11-19

Jesus Heals Ten Men with Leprosy

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

This miracle contains a double level of cultural tension. The main character in our story is both a leper and a Samaritan. Samaritans were disliked by Jews for intermarrying and for giving up their faith. The idea of a Samaritan leper receiving God’s help was hugely shocking to many. As these people, both Samaritans and lepers had been written off as ever being worthy to receive the grace of God.

As Jesus enters a village, he is approached by ten lepers. The fact that they draw near to him says much, since lepers were expected to isolate themselves from people. They know at least one thing about Jesus, he is approachable, even if others are not. Still, they call to him from a distance honouring the Old Testament command not to mix with other people. (Leviticus 13:45-46)

⁴⁵ “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ ⁴⁶ As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp”.

The lepers ask for mercy, (“have pity on us”). This is a cry for compassion. A request that Jesus often hears. They want to be healed. However, they must have wondered or been that desperate or had faith that Jesus might heal them.

Jesus quickly removes any of their doubts. Those who come to him receive relief even from a distance. He tells them to show themselves to the priest as the law commands. As the lepers turn, they are healed. Only as they are on their way, do we find out that “they were made clean.” Jesus responds to their cries for mercy by drawing from them an act of faith that results in their physical healing. Jesus offers them grace and salvation.

However, as we find out in this story deliverance does not necessarily bring thankfulness. One of the men breaks from the group full of praise for God. He falls at the feet of Jesus and offers thanksgiving for his healing. Jesus asks rhetorically, “Were not 10 made clean? but the other nine, where are they? Were none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” This questioning is designed not for the missing nine or the Samaritan, but for the consideration of Jesus’ disciples and curious onlookers. What does it mean that only “this foreigner” returned to thank God?

Jesus then addresses the healed Samaritan: “***Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well***” but wasn’t the Samaritan already well even before, he came back praising God and giving thanks to Jesus? Jesus had healed him as well as the nine others who had leprosy. Yet, it was only the Samaritan who returned to thank Jesus for his healing.

The deliverance that Jesus affirms here is much ***greater*** than the healing the man has experienced. He had responded to Jesus’s act of mercy. Faith and salvation merge. Jesus continues to minister to any who reach out to him. Nobody is turned away.

When people cry out, God answers. It’s important that our hearts commune with God and express praise and gratitude to him. The book of Luke is filled with passages where people take the time to thank and praise God.

1. Be thankful even if you are in difficult circumstances. We read the story too quickly, I think. Slow it down, and picture it with me. We start with ten men who have the worst disease of their day. The physical ramifications are horrendous. Leprosy attacks the body, leaving sores, missing fingers, missing toes, damaged limbs. In many cases, the initial pain of leprosy gives way to

something more terrible than that - a loss of sensation in nerve endings, leading to more damage to more body parts.

The disease can take 30 years to run its course, and in that time span, entire limbs can simply fall off. It is, assuredly, a most horrible disease. We have nearly an impossible task in trying to fathom what it was like 2,000 years ago, when medical treatment as we know it today was almost non-existent.

Beth Moore, in her book *Jesus the One and Only*, tells of an occasion she had to be near a modern-day leper colony. Something within her had always wanted to minister in a leper colony, but her trip overseas had given her the first opportunity to be near such a place. She walked by the entrance three times. She saw those who were suffering. She begged herself for a chance to go inside. But she could not.

The reason? The smell overwhelmed her. She could not work up the stomach to go inside the colony. She could not bear the thought of witnessing for the Lord, but at the same time becoming violently ill as she faced human beings already acutely aware that they were different. The trip passed, and she was not able to go inside.

I think, we gained a new appreciation of how bad this disease must have been in the days of Christ. It wasn't just the grotesque damage, or the attack to our sight. It wasn't just the loud cries, the attack to our hearing. It was also the smell of rotting, decaying flesh, overwhelming even our sense of smell.

The emotional pain of a leper, however, must have been even worse than the physical pain. He was removed from his family, from his community. There could be no contact, whatsoever, with his children or grandchildren. None. Immediately removed. His wife would not be allowed to kiss him goodbye. He would not have allowed it, for fear that she, too, would become afflicted. Lepers tended to roam together, looking for food, begging for assistance from a great distance, learning to yell in loud voices, both from the need to warn others, and to beg for help from across the way.

What would it have been like to have been removed from friends and family for a lifetime, and to have been forced to announce that removal on a daily basis? It must have been horrible and yet, in this account, ten men encounter Jesus, and hear him say the most unusual thing. "We want to be well!" they scream at Jesus. And the great teacher responds, "Go and show yourselves to the priest."

The local priest had duties other than leading worship on each Sabbath. He was also something of a health official. If a person was miraculously healed of leprosy, it was up to the priest to inspect the body, to test for a complete removal of the disease, and to announce the person healed. In such cases, the person would have been cleansed, and at that point, it would be fine for the leper to see his wife again, to hold his daughter again, to look for work again. If the priest gave him the OK, he would be healed!

Now, Jesus says to these lepers, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." They look down at their bodies. The hands of one man are still mangled. Another man looks at his leg, which ends with a filthy rag at the knee. Another looks at his skin, and finds it as repulsive as ever. In other words, all of these men were no better off than they had been ten minutes earlier, when they had first spotted the famous teacher.

In order for the miracle to happen, these men had to start walking in faith before their circumstances had changed one tiny bit. You cannot wait until the problems are over to start walking in faith. You cannot put conditions on Holy God. You cannot say, "Lord, as soon as there's enough money, I will follow your instructions." You cannot pray, "Lord, if you'll just solve this issue in my family, I'll start to attend church." You cannot put conditions on God! Instead, God places a demand for faith on us, before anything at all has changed.

God might say, "Love me despite the disease. Obey me despite the lack of talent, or the lack of resources. Follow me now, despite the depression. Say no to the temptation, while it still is difficult. Praise me in the darkest of nights, and in the worst of circumstances." Will you be thankful despite the difficult circumstances? If so, you will have experienced faith. As God says to the apostle Paul "my grace is sufficient for you". Learn to delight in imperfect gifts.

2. Be thankful in the work of God's goodness

This kind of thankfulness is worship. One of the men came back to Jesus, and praised God. He was thankful. He was public about it. He was loud - he wasn't shy at all. Why was he so loud? This guy had been forced to yell for as long as he'd had leprosy. Had it been years? He'd probably yelled so long, he didn't know how to come to the Lord quietly, or even in a normal voice. When he came back and fell at the feet of Jesus, he was just louder than the normal person, and he was praising God.

This is an amazingly short application point. This week, be sure you take time to acknowledge God for his goodness. Be sure to actually be thankful. Be sure to gather everyone up for a prayer of Thanksgiving that's a real prayer of thankfulness. Don't miss the opportunity to worship God this week. And be loud about it!

3. We need to be thankful both as a church and as individual followers of Christ.

One healed leper came back. One caught himself in the midst of the celebration, and returned to Jesus. He reversed his steps, put his family on hold, put the priest on hold, and came back to the cause of his celebration.

"Made you well . . ." that's a different word. It's not a medical word, necessarily, although it was used to describe the safe delivery of a baby. When Matthew began his gospel, he started with the Christmas story. The angel told Joseph to name the Christ child "Jesus," because that name meant that he would "**save** people from their sins." When Paul described what would happen to a person who publicly professed Jesus as Lord and **saviour**, he used this same word.

". . . If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be **saved**. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are **saved** (Romans 10:9-10).

And Jesus says to this very thankful man willing to follow God before his circumstances changed - to worship God before he returned home - Jesus pronounces a complete healing, a wellness that passes all other wellness terms. This man, Jesus said, understands.

4. Learn to Delight in Imperfect Gifts.

Ever been to one of those outlet stores where they sell products labelled '**slightly imperfect**'. Sometimes the imperfections are easily seen; other times they are barely noticeable. The same is true in our lives. Not only with the products we buy but with the gifts we receive

We must learn to be grateful for all the "**slightly Imperfect**" gifts in our lives. God himself chooses to delight in imperfect gifts in you and me. Even though our lives and hearts may be flawed- God receives us with real joy.

God knows what it's like to have gifts perfect in their original form, then cast aside. His creation-this world- our home.

Jesus watched frustrated as he presented his gift of words to people who refused to hear them. He knew the frustration of longing to impart the gift of forgiveness to people who refused to repent. He longed to heal people who refused to believe.

Jesus knew the frustration of throwing a banquet to which guests refuse to come. What he knew to be the ultimate gift to the world, yet the world was slow to accept his gift. However, Jesus' frustration was bathed in hope. The miracle of God's love is that he should become a human being, work as a carpenter and grow hungry and tired and weak.

We will always have much to be thankful for. Remember our story of the lepers. There is no abuse that has scarred you so badly that Jesus won't touch you. Jesus is willing to lovingly and gently touch you, hold you, and restore you. No sin has made you unlovable. Jesus is willing to call you his friend, and stand beside you. His death paid for your sin. No fear has disqualified you. No problem has put your life on hold. No failure has negated his love. The miracle of thanksgiving, of being thankful is the love of Jesus, for you. No exceptions, no qualifications, no doubts. He loves you and for that, O God, we are so thankful.