

## **Series Gospel of Luke**

### **This Message #29**

#### **Scripture Luke 17:11-19**

For the past several weeks our studies have been from the portion of Luke's Gospel which describes Jesus' travels throughout Judea. Most of His first three years of public ministry was in Galilee. Then, during the last six months before the crucifixion He spent almost all His time in the rural areas of Judea and the nearby area just east of the Jordan River.

Luke describes four miracles performed by Jesus during His months of travel throughout the region of Judea. There may have been more than four miracles, but the gospel writers do not mention them. The increasing opposition of the religious leaders may have limited the number of people who came to Jesus for help. The lack of miracles was not due to any inadequacy on Jesus' part. Rather He could not do many miracles there because of the lack of faith of the people.

Today we are going to think about the healing of several men who had leprosy.

#### **Read Luke 17:11-19**

This episode is told in a straightforward way, with few words, and the main point is obvious. Jesus took pity on the plight of ten men, and all the men were cleansed (healed) of their physical problems, but only one of the ten men returned to acknowledge the miracle of God's grace in his life. The circumstances of all the men were supernaturally and significantly changed. How sad that only one man had the courtesy to express his appreciation.

The English Bible uses the word “leprosy” to describe the medical problems of these men, but this is not the same kind of “leprosy” that we associate with the crippling and disfiguring disease [*elephantiasis graecorum*] that we today call by the name “leprosy”. The men in Luke 17 had skin diseases, and these diseases are described in Leviticus chapter 13. These skin diseases were identified as a “swelling or a rash or a white spot on the skin.” These skin diseases were considered to be infectious if they spread or expanded over the body. These kinds of medical problems were quite common in the Middle East, and still are.

According to the Old Testament Law, a person with a suspected skin disease was to be examined by a priest. Depending on what the priest saw, the person could be quarantined for a period of time for observation. If the rash or sore faded and did not spread, then there was no problem; the person could resume his or her regular activities. However, if the affected area increased in size, or if there was swelling, or the skin changed color and became more blotchy, if the hair in the area turned white, or there was raw flesh, then the person was assumed to have an infectious disease and was declared ceremonially unclean.

This individual immediately became an outcast of society. He or she had to live alone outside the village, away from family and friends. The person had to wear clothes that were torn, let their hair be untidy, cover the lower part of the face, and call out “Unclean! Unclean!” when other people were nearby so that healthy people could avoid physical contact.

The circumstances of people with infectious diseases were very sad. They were deprived of social interaction, employment, meaningful activity. They could not experience the touch of a loved one. They sometimes had to scrounge for their food among the garbage thrown out by other citizens.

These skin diseases could appear on people of all levels of society. It was a traumatic embarrassment and indignity when a person discovered he or she had such a medical problem. This was in an era when isolation was necessary to prevent the spread of infections. There were no ointments or inoculations or medicines to provide a cure.

When Jesus encountered the 10 men who had infectious skin problems, the men stood at a distance which, according to the Law, they were supposed to do, and they called to Jesus with a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

We don't know how they recognized Jesus or why they assumed that He could help them. Luke does not explain this, nor does Luke explain what expectation these men had of Jesus. Did they understand that Jesus had healed other sick and lame people? When they addressed Jesus as "Master" did this imply that they had some special knowledge about His unique nature and authority? We don't know the answers to these questions. We know that they were intensely aware of their need for healing, and desperate for help. They undoubtedly wanted to return to their families and resume their normal activities. They recognized that only a person with a great compassionate heart would give any attention to them, and they hoped that Jesus would be that kind of person. Hence, they shouted, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When Jesus saw them, He said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." These instructions were in keeping with the Law. Only the priests could validate a cure. But the instructions of Jesus were really a test of the faith and obedience of the men. Verse 14 indicates that they were healed while on their way to the priests. Jesus did not heal them immediately and then send them on their way to the priests. Jesus did not even give assurance ahead of time that they would be healed. The healing would only be possible if they accepted the instructions of Jesus, believed what He said, and obediently followed through with appropriate action.

We don't know if the men discussed among themselves the instructions of Jesus. They may have eagerly and quickly gotten on their way. Perhaps some of them were weak in their faith and not convinced that the instructions would accomplish anything. They might have said, "Eh, we might as well go. What do we have to lose?" Luke tells what happens next in a very concise way, "As they went on their way, they were cleansed (or healed)."

The story to this point has given us important context and background information. The emphasis of this story is in verses 15-18. "One of the men, when he recognized that he was healed, came back." This man "returned declaring his praises to God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him."

I am certain that all the men were grateful for their restored health, and I understand that they were eager to return to their families and friends as quickly as possible. Their return to their homes would be an occasion of great joy. But why did only one man make a declaration of thanks to the One who made their restoration possible?

There are many examples in Scripture of people who displayed a lack of appreciation toward God for His works of grace and mercy. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel seldom said “thank you” to God for His provision and protection. For examples, when God miraculously fed His people in the desert after their release from the bondage in Egypt, they complained instead of giving thanks, and later, when God protected them from enemy nations which were much more powerful, the Israelites did not respond to God with thankfulness nor keep themselves separate from the surrounding nations, but rather integrated the pagan religious practices of their enemies into their own religious activities. God said that their lack of thankfulness and obedience was a gross insult to Himself.

All too often, the Israelites failed to declare their appreciation to God. They enjoyed the blessings that God showered on them, but instead of gratefulness about what God provided, they became more and more selfish. They took God and His blessings for granted. They developed a sense of entitlement. At times, they assumed that God was indebted to them rather than the opposite reality — that they were the benefactors of mercy and grace and, hence, indebted to God. As the recipients of the mercy and grace of God, God expected them to be thankful and to worship Him in appreciation of who He was and what He had done.

One man returned “praising God in a loud voice.” Thankfulness is closely linked with praise. Praise is an acknowledgement of something done well. Praise can certainly be directed to God because He does all things well. The man who returned recognized that the power of God had been manifested in Jesus, and therefore He not only praised God but he “threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him.” This was genuine and sincere worship expressed through appreciation for who God was and what He had done.

If we take the broadest possible view of Scripture, we will recognize that the slide of humanity away from God springs from people's lack of thankfulness and their refusal to give glory to God. Let me read a few verses from Romans chapter 1 — verses which summarize this slide of humanity away from God:

“What may be known about God is plain to mankind, because God has made it plain to them. Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” That was the starting point; now here is what happened: “Although people knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, and their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Over time “they exchanged the glory of the immortal God to images [made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles]; they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and they worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.”

As a result, “God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts” and people became “filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity.” People drifted away from God because they were not thankful and refused to give glory to Him, and after a period of time, God said, “If people will not acknowledge Me, I will let them do whatever they want to do.”

“Jesus asked, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?’ My concern as a pastor is that too many of God's people today are following the behaviors of the 9 men who did not return to thank Jesus and to praise God. Too many believers today are following the practices of the Israelites of the Old Testament. Jesus Himself was concerned about the nine men — men who had personally benefited in a miraculous way from God's blessing, and then neglected to give God any credit, glory, or thanks. Jesus is also undoubtedly concerned about any of us who have personally experienced the blessing of God and failed to give credit where it is due.

We need to remember that God, through Jesus, has healed us of a spiritual disease which is infinitely worse than any skin disease. We have a sin disease. This sin disease has separated us from God and wreaked havoc with our interpersonal relationships, our systems of justice, and our sense of right and wrong. Because of sin, humanity had to be declared by God as ceremonially unclean and every person became an outcast, excluded from the presence of God.

Fortunately, God had pity and compassion on us, and He gave us instructions about what to do. He told us that we must go to our heavenly priest, Jesus, in faith and obedience. Scripture explains very clearly that if we go to Him in faith and obedience, then we will be cleansed of our sin disease. We will be the recipients of God's love and grace and mercy. He will have given us a gift that we didn't deserve and couldn't earn.

What do you do when someone gives you a gift that you don't deserve and can't earn? The only thing which is appropriate is to humbly and sincerely say, "Thank You." What do you do if the gift is given by an eternal God and His gift is eternal life? The only thing which is appropriate is to "worship Him forever in appreciation for who He is and what He has done."