

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

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



I decided to step out of my usual preaching schedule this week to do a lesson on Thanksgiving. There is so much going on in this story that I hardly know where to start. It is unusual for me to preach on a topic, but I felt like it was a good way to start our holiday season. In the coming weeks, I'll be doing an Advent Series called "Four Gifts of our Spiritual Inheritance." The story today is a bit odd. Jesus is making His way through the countryside when ten lepers search Him out. As they stood afar off from Him, they were crying out to Him: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" In this account we find: (1) healing of the incurable, (2) seeking help from the only source that can really help, (3) grace being given to a larger number of people, and (4) worship and gratitude coming from unexpected persons. We will examine some key elements of the story, and then we'll look at spiritual truths we can garner from the story.

1. Healing of the Incurable - The Horror of Leprosy

Leprosy was an incurable disease. Leprosy was not just an ancient disease. As a child, I saw a person with leprosy in Galveston where we had a summer home. This woman who had a strange, disfigured face would walk by our house, and my dad, who was a physician, pointed her out to me. It is a peculiar disease. It is extremely difficult to contract it, requiring many months of exposure to an infected person. It disfigures a person's face and limbs. It is caused by a bacteria and is easily treated with antibiotics. If left untreated, it can have devastating effects. It can result in patches of discolored skin, purple nodules, ulcers on the bottom of your feet, weakness, paralysis, loss of vision, and other eye disorders. People were terrified of it in ancient times, and the law required that a leper be cast out of society so that the disease would not spread to the greater population. In ancient Israel, it was a death sentence and a sentence of isolation. The disease would progress to horrific disfiguration leading eventually to death.

Interestingly, sin is also an incurable disease. It often takes a while for sin to progress to the point of disfiguring a person's soul (and sometimes even their face). But it can often (and literally does) change a person's demeanor. It works its way into every part of a person's body. It affects a person's emotions and can even be evidenced in a person's physical appearance. Evil sometimes takes on a look of its own. I previously mentioned those reels we see on the internet of pitiful people who are hopelessly in the throws of drug addiction or alcoholism. They often look soulless. It sells itself as independence, when all the while it is a life of domination and control by a substance or force outside of oneself. In Jewish law, people who became aware of the disease in their bodies were commanded to go to the priest to be examined to find whether they had the disease and whether they would need to live in isolation until they died. Sin is an incurable condition without Jesus.

2. Seeking the Right Help from the Right Person

Jesus had healed several lepers prior to this healing (see Luke 5:12-14; Mark 1:40-42, Matthew 8:2-3; 11:5), and here He is approached by a group of ten from a leper colony. They kept their distance as the Levitical law required, but from a distance they cried, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" The story seems odd at this point in the account. Jesus doesn't approach them. He doesn't touch them. He really has very little to say to them. He just tells them to go show themselves to the priest. And, what did they do? They obeyed him. They didn't ask Him to come over and touch them or to do anything else. They just did what He said to do. Obviously, they had heard of the wondrous works of this amazing rabbi, and they went looking for Jesus when they realized that their condition was hopeless. Is that something we do? When we finally realize that our own condition is hopeless and Jesus is our only hope, like the lepers, we decide whether to cry out, "Jesus, Master, have pity on me!" Or, to stay mired in our hopeless condition.

At the moment that Jesus spoke to them they were still diseased. But, in faith they obeyed Him. As they made their way to the priest they noticed that they had been healed. Going to the priest couldn't heal them, but obeying Jesus' command did heal them. It seems that every time Jesus healed a diseased person He would ask either, "do you want to be healed" or "do you believe that I can do this" (see Matthew 9:28 and Mark 9:20-24). The writer of Hebrews tells us, "that without faith it is impossible to please Him." It's the same way with us. In order for Jesus to heal us of our condition, we must desire that He do so. And, we must believe that He can do so. Do you feel like you have something that only God can set right? Do you really want to be healed of that thing? Do you truly believe that God CAN heal you of that thing. And realize, I am not just talking about physical elements at all. I'm talking about the other things that you've become aware of over time that need healing. I'm talking about broken family relationships, broken marital relationships, broken career dreams, heartache and brokenness over perhaps

the lack of someone to love in your life, and of course, physical ailments of all kinds. In these conditions of hopelessness, there truly is only one person Who can help us, and that person is Jesus.

We don't really know how far down the road these lepers had gone before realizing that they were healed. We, too, sometimes must go a ways before we see the work that God is doing in our lives or to see how He is dealing with our problem. Just do what He says. "Go show it to the priest." So how do we "show it to the priest." The writer of Hebrews tells us.

¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16, NKJV). Church, Jesus is our High Priest. Go to Him.

3. Grace was given to more than just the Jews in the Leper Colony.

The Bible informs us that one of the persons healed was a Samaritan. What a delightful detail that God orchestrated in the story. Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the Jews and were despised by them. The Samaritan's history originates after the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. They were the descendants of Israelites who stayed in the land of Israel after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BC. They claimed to descend from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the sons of Joseph). By the time the Babylonian exile had ended, they had developed their own interpretations of the Torah, Talmud, etc. The religious Jews saw them as traitors of a sort as they intermarried with other people around them who were not Israelites.

We might relate to this better if we think of it in terms of racial prejudice which produces a belief in a person's heart that they are somehow better than one of "those guys" (whoever "those guys" might be). Even more applicable is the possibility of us feeling spiritually superior to someone that God brings into our life or our church. It is the odd person that is different than we are. This is a reminder to us that God extends His grace to all. There are no favorites. The Old Testament is full of scriptures pointing to the wide net of salvation that God extended even to the Gentiles. That includes most of us reading this or those who are in the room hearing the sermon.

When Jesus extended healing, He didn't separate the Jewish lepers from the Samaritan leper. Instead, He extended His healing to the whole group. He does the same thing with us. Salvation is available to all the peoples of the earth. Scripture tells us, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16, KJV). The word "whosoever" means everybody. We are further assured of this offer of universal grace because we're also told in scripture, *⁹ The Lord is not*

*slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9, KJV).*

4. Having a Thankful Heart

This passage tells us that only one person returned to give thanks to God for what He had done. And not only was there only one, he was the Samaritan! He was the odd man out. He was the one that was different. This tells us that gratitude is VERY IMPORTANT in walking in obedience to God. He desires for you and me to express our thankfulness to Him for anything and everything that He does for us. I have met people in my life who have a hard time saying “thank you” to others. I am not sure why this is. Perhaps it’s because they somehow think that it makes them indebted to others. Maybe it’s just because they were never taught the importance for saying “thank you” for what others do for them. Maybe they don’t even realize it when they are being blessed. I don’t know, but I do know that if they have trouble saying thank you to people, they’ll probably not have a very thankful heart to God for what He does for them either.

I’ve taught repeatedly over the years that joy is tied to a thankful heart. People that are not thankful are people that can’t experience the inheritance of joy that the Bible promises us. Scripture almost always ties joy to thanksgiving. Here are a few examples:

***In everything give thanks:** for this is the will of God **in** Christ Jesus concerning you. (1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV).*

*¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and **be ye thankful**. (Colossians 3:15, KJV).*

*O **give thanks unto the LORD**, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. (Psalm 107:1, KJV).*

*⁹ Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ **Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;** (Ephesians 5:19-20, KJV).*

*⁶ Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7, KJV).*

This Thanksgiving season, I want to encourage all of us to put on a garment of thanksgiving. I'm not talking about fall colors, but rather a cloak around us that shows our thanksgiving for each and everything that God has done in our lives. You might say, "but Pastor Faber, I really don't have much to be thankful for."

START THANKING HIM in the midst of your circumstances. Thank Him that He will give you the grace to carry you through what you're going through. As you do this, you will sense a well-being and a peace that is inexplicable. Thank Him for His goodness. Thank Him for His unending enduring love.

One Out of Ten

Jesus didn't withhold the healing from the nine who did not thank Him. Yet, He made a point of their lack of gratitude. Jesus expressed deep disappointment that the nine Jews that were healed never bothered to say "thank you." Are you guilty of forgetting to thank God when your prayers are answered? It's easy to do. We get out of our tight spot and immediately forget that it was He who delivered us. We need to be grateful and let God and others know when we're grateful.

All ten were physically healed because of their faith. Yet, the leper got a healing that the others didn't experience. Jesus' words to the Samaritan leper imply that he also received a spiritual healing in addition to being healed of the disease. In their dialogue, the Samaritan leper was told, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well" (verse 19). Perhaps falling at Jesus' feet in gratitude gave him a complete and total healing. When we acknowledge the Giver and not just the gifts, spiritual healing comes. Let's look at some challenges as we move into Thanksgiving.

- 1 Who was the one? It was a Samaritan, the outsider. Jesus said, "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" The nine represent a superficial faith. The one represents transformative faith.
- 2 What can we learn? What unclean areas of your life has Jesus cleaned up? Write them down. Fall at His feet and be grateful. What kindnesses have others shown you? Become a person who expresses thanks with spoken and written words.

May our tables not just overflow with turkey this year, but with testimonies to ALL THAT GOD HAS DONE, IS DOING, AND WILL DO IN OUR LIVES.

Let us pray.

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INSERT IN THE BULLETIN

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NUMBER TEN IN HEBREW



The significance of 10 – divine order, completed cycle, the number of people required to gather in worship and corporate prayer. Ten represents the whole tithe, a complete congregation, a body, and a kingdom. The tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet is the lowly yohd, sometimes referred to as “the little Jew.” It is a pictograph of a little hand meaning work, worship, deeds, power, a congregation.

In scripture we find the Ten Commandments and Abraham’s 10 trials. We see that Sodom would have been spared for the sake of ten righteous people, and that Laban changed Jacob’s wages 10 times. We read that ten brothers were sent down to Egypt to buy grain, that Joseph sent 10 donkeys back to his father loaded with the best of the land, that ten spies were sent into the land, that Israel gathered 10 homers of manna in the wilderness, that Boaz sat before 10 men at the gate to redeem Naomi’s field, that there were 10 virgins (wise and foolish), and that there were 10 generations between Adam and Noah. There are many more instances of the number ten in scripture, but probably most importantly, there are 10 days of awe between Rosh HaShanah, and on the tenth of the month of Nisan, lambs were set-apart for each household and inspected for the Passover sacrifice.

This was mirrored in Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on the tenth of Aviv as the sacrificial Lamb of God. And lastly, the Prophet Zechariah tells us, *Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”’* (Zechariah 8:23, NASB 1995).