

Luke 17:11-19 Oct.13, 2013

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled 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 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Picture this. You're traveling with Jesus - just entering a small town - when a commotion grabs your attention. There look to be a group of men walking towards you – at a distance still. You note their tattered clothes. Their long, unkempt hair. (See Leviticus 13:45-46.) The cloth covering the lower half of their faces doesn't hide the missing limbs on some; the decaying flesh that's clinging to others.

They are the Untouchables. The Walking Dead. I'm not talking about fictional, glamorized encounters with zombies, like Hollywood is putting out these days. I'm talking real life lepers. These 10 real people... are human beings with souls just like yours and mine. Though, the reaction to them is probably not much different than were we to see a monster. Horror. "Don't come any closer!" Revulsion. "They're contagious!"

These 10 lepers know how people feel about them. From the first moment they heard the words, "You have leprosy," they felt the crushing blow. Their lives became a living death. They were ordered to separate from their loved ones ~ mothers, fathers, sons, daughters ~ and to live apart from them. They were not allowed to grieve over their horrific prognosis in the warmth of their families' arms. They were never allowed the comfort of having a loved one hold their hand, as they watched their bodies slowly dying before their eyes.

But there was more. According to the records of Alfred Edersheim, one rabbi tells how he would not eat an egg purchased in a street where there was a leper. Another rabbi boasted that if he ever saw a leper, he threw stones at them to make sure they stayed far away [Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol 1, p.489f]. If the religious leaders in the community treated the lepers like this, how do you think everyone else acted? Kids, if the grown-ups, acted like this toward the lepers, how do you expect the kids treated them?

This group of ten lepers that approached Jesus this day, obeyed the rules established by God. They stood at a distance. If they came near people, they had to cry out: "Unclean! Unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45-46). Can you imagine the anguish and the pain? They came as close to Jesus as they could. Stopped. Desperation. Hope. "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

The fact that the lepers even dared call out to Jesus shows something. These lepers would have likely fled from other rabbis of Jesus' day, afraid of what might be thrown at them or yelled at them. But with Jesus. . . while staying at a distance, they came with their request.

They knew they had nothing to offer Jesus. They were asking for an act of sheer mercy. They didn't try to give some reason Jesus really ought to help them – some claim to merit: "We've really had it bad. Look. We've obeyed everything required of us. See how well we're handling this death sentence? We deserve a break!" No. Only: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Read the first sentence of v. 14.

Jesus' response might sound strange to us, if we didn't have an understanding of the regulations of those days. The priest made the diagnosis of leprosy, and the priests made the decisive judgment if someone was healed (Leviticus ch.13-14). So when Jesus says, "Go show yourselves to the priests," everyone in Israel knew (or should have): "Hey, he is telling them to do what those who have been healed of leprosy are supposed to do." In reality, that was so rare that the people of that day always considered it an act of God if a leper was healed [Adersheim].

But the one large-as-life problem still at this point? Staring up from their own skin as the 10 looked down? They weren't yet healed!

Yet... The word Jesus spoke to the 10 lepers contained a promise. They would be healed by the time they reached the priest's doorstep. For the moment, they must carry their disease and Jesus' word on their way. This would mean trust.

Read from the second part of v. 14-16.

Here is evidence of the power of Jesus' Word. The Word gave these men confidence to walk away from Jesus with only his promise to go on. And along the way, the lepers were healed!

Imagine the joy! Don't you, sitting here 2000 years later feel happy for them? The death sentence had been lifted! They were whole! They could return to their lives!

Does it bring you comfort to see how Jesus treats these lepers who called out to him for help? If this was all we had to carry away and treasure in our hearts from this account, these 2 truths alone would be worth our time of study today: 1. The love of Jesus is not swayed by human influences. Kids: the love of Jesus is not affected by who is cool and who is not. He loves you no matter how anyone else feels about you or treats you. 2. The power of His Word is unlimited! Kids: that means, Jesus can do anything! See the power of God to simply say the Word, to give a command ~ and his will is done.

A great voice is heard in reply. But it is no longer a chorus. A solo voice now rises out of the group.

Seeing how the love and the Word of Jesus touched his leprosy and made him whole as promised, brought the one leper back to Jesus in praise. . . Jesus' Word to this leper was soul-changing. (Read the last Word of Jesus in this section, and you see.) This man went away this day with more than just a healthy body. Faith in Jesus resided in his heart.

Read v. 17-19.

Jesus notices the 9 are missing. The one who returned was a foreigner. We understand, then, the nine were of Jewish descent, people of the covenant. And so what do we see? Those who had it all (God's Word, the temple worship, the promises – Romans 9:1-4), took for granted the most important fulfillment of the Word seen this day: their Savior, standing in front of them.

And this is nothing new. It's been this way throughout the history of God's people. The Lord warned his people of a pattern (Deut. 8:10-20): forgetting his blessings, which can lead to forgetting about him altogether.

- In Israel's history, when the ink was still drying from God's great acts to rescue them out of Egypt, what did the Israelites do? Psalm 106:21 retells it: "they forgot..." & they worshiped a golden calf.

If you're anything like me, you'll have no trouble applying what you see here to your own life. Like the 9 lepers, we are people of the covenant ~ in the New Testament way ~ those who have been brought to faith in Jesus as Savior. Take a moment to think about ~ to really think about ~ the blessings that are yours through faith.

- (list spiritual blessings)
- And from there we could go on to list all the physical blessings too.

But there are nasty truths about ourselves, truths we'd like desperately not to be true. We carry around our filthy, rotten sinful nature. And in the selfishness oozing from every pore of that sinful nature, we so easily take for granted the Giver of all that is good in our lives.

Do you ever notice ~ as you go about your daily activities ~ you're more likely to call out to God when you're in need, than to call out in praise and worship? Understand: there's nothing wrong with bringing our requests to God. Bring 'em: Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you (1 Peter 5).

But sometimes we act like "foul weather friends." Does this pattern sound familiar? We experience trouble. We call on God for help. We dig into His Word for strength. We are led into a closer relationship with our Lord. Then, things get "back to normal." And we find ourselves drifting a little, or a lot, from the daily devotional studies of God's Word and prayer. Or it becomes at the very least, more sporadic.

Do you sense, like me, the tendency to begin to take for granted the gifts he has given, especially the spiritual? Ingratitude and ultimately indifference is an easy path to follow.

How many youth, for instance, drift away from their Christian faith? In a recent documentary I watched, statistics cited 4 out of 5 Christian teens drift away from their Christian faith. [You'll find slightly different numbers out there, but the various studies all return a quite high number.] Youth/teen programs aren't a magic bullet. In fact, more and more researchers are discovering a fatal combination: feel good entertainment as the focus of youth group programs, combined with many parents forgetting their own God-given duty to talk about His truth when they sit at home or go places. While we're thankful some of those teens return when they have children, we understand the danger to forget about God and walk away. And that danger doesn't end at a magic age.

Each of us can ask ourselves: how important of a priority is my Savior in my daily life? in my discussions with my loved ones? Where have I failed to acknowledge my Lord and give him the praise he deserves?

Separation. That is the rejection I deserve to face from my Holy God. I deserve to be sent away – eternally, into the fires prepared for the devil. I, because of sin, deserve to have my God treat me as a leper: untouchable with the disease and decay of sin.

Ahhh! The Lord's mercy continues through all generations. He reaches out - yes, to this day – and heals from the leprosy of sin.

He did this at great pain to himself. He my Holy Lord took my place: he was “rejected.” People were “appalled at him” ... “his appearance was so disfigured” ... “he was despised” ... “like one from whom men hide their faces” (Isaiah 53). He took upon himself the leprous sin of us all... the one who had no sin, became sin for us... he faced the forsaking of God the Father. He took everything I deserve from God...

In fact, Jesus was on his way there, even as these events in Luke ch.17 occurred... Jesus was “on the way to Jerusalem.” Check your references before and after in Luke's Gospel (9:51, 13:22 & 18:31), and you'll see: this is Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem. And on his way to his suffering and death, his love for hurting people pours over... Even to those upon whom his act of kindness is lost, who return no gratitude, he looks – he speaks – he helps.

He has led us, here, to call out: “Jesus, Master, have pity on us, sinners. To you alone we turn for rescue.” “And by his wounds we are healed.” He gives us life, life to the full (John 10:10).

Yes, the Lord's mercy continues through all generations. Here, in this sanctuary, sits the evidence. Our Lord reaches out to outcasts – the Holy Spirit opens eyes to see Jesus as Savior – he touches the leprous souls of sinners like you and I... and we are healed.

At Jesus' feet, we fall in thanks.

Now... ***“To him who is able to keep you from falling away and who is able to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*** - Jude 24-25