

Luke 17:11-19 **Ten Healed, One Saved**

Jesus performed many miracles while He was Incarnate, but perhaps no miracles proved as immediately valuable and life changing (in the worldly sense) as His miracles of healing. Healing was a near-constant activity of Jesus, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23). As He healed, word of His miraculous power “spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them” (Matthew 4:24).

He healed both those He knew, “³⁸then He got up and left the synagogue, and entered Simon’s home. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Him to help her. ³⁹And standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately got up and waited on them” (Luke 4:38-39), and those He did not, “while the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and laying His hands on each one of them, He was healing them” (Luke 4:40).

He healed both those who asked, “⁴⁰and as Jesus returned, the people welcomed Him, for they had all been waiting for Him. ⁴¹And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus’ feet, and began to implore Him to come to his house; ⁴²for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying” (Luke 8:40-42), and those who were reluctant to come forward, “⁴³and a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, ⁴⁴came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped” (Luke 8:43-44).

His opponents even tried to use His miraculous power of healing against Him. “⁶On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. ⁷The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him” (Luke 6:6-7). But Jesus was not intimidated, “after looking around at them all, He said to him, ‘stretch out your hand!’ And he did so; and his hand was restored” (Luke 6:10). And Jesus continued to heal, even though it provoked His opponents, “¹⁰He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, ‘woman, you are freed from your sickness.’ ¹³And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God” (Luke 12:10-13).

These miraculous healings, among other deeds Jesus performed, gave proof of His deity. They were irrefutable demonstrations of His claim to be the Messiah, the Chosen One sent from God. As Jesus, Himself, asserted, “the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish - the very works that I do - testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36).

In this passage, Luke recounts another miraculous healing of Jesus. Not simply the healing of a single individual, this account records Jesus healing ten men, all afflicted with one of the most horrible diseases

known to man - leprosy. Leprosy is a generic term for any number of skin-related diseases. The most horrible is Hansen's disease (after G. H. A. Hansen, who discovered the bacterium that causes the disease in 1873), which is what leprosy is known by today. In the OT there was considerable space in the Law devoted to regulating the disease (Leviticus 13-14). The disease was seen as a curse from God, and something only God could cure. When Naaman, the captain of the army of the king of Aram was infected, he was sent to the Jehoram, king of Israel, to be cured. Recognizing the impossibility of this, and the fact that the king of Aram might use it against him, "he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?'" (2 Kings 5:7).

Cases of leprosy are recorded not only in the Bible, but also in the cultures of ancient China, Egypt, and India. The bacteria affects the skin, upper respiratory tract, eyes, and nerves of the body. Though it is not highly infectious, it can be transmitted by close contact, especially with areas of the nose and mouth. People can be infected for up to twenty years before symptoms appear. Despite urban legend, leprosy does not cause the skin to rot away. Instead, the victims of the disease lose feeling in the face and extremities and naturally wear away the tissue. The horrible disfigurement accompanying the disease was no doubt a cause of the social stigma associated with it. Modern treatments were ineffective until the 1940s, and today the disease is curable, and even the disabling effects can be managed if treated early. There are about 211,000 new cases reported worldwide in 2015, and 178 of those were in the United States.

In context, we must remember that to the Jewish mind, any catastrophic illness or handicap had always been considered a punishment for sin.

⁷Remember now, who ever perished being innocent?

Or where were the upright destroyed?

⁸According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity

And those who sow trouble harvest it.

⁹By the breath of God they perish,

And by the blast of His anger they come to an end" (Job 4:7-9).

And this remained the understanding in Jesus' time, "¹as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ²And His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?'" (John 9:1-2). These ten men afflicted with leprosy were physically deformed, socially ostracized, and completely without hope. That Jesus chose to heal them is a remarkable display not only of His deity, but His compassion. That only one returned to thank Him is, perhaps, not unexpected given the depravity of man, but it is heartbreaking nonetheless. But the point of Luke's narrative is not that ten were healed; it is that one was eternally saved.

Ten Healed

Why does Luke put this passage here? Perhaps to contrast the one thankful leper with the servant in the previous parable who expected what he had no right to.

Jesus “was on the way to Jerusalem” (v. 11). Before He arrived for the final time in Jerusalem, Jesus made three trips to the area. The first is recorded in John 7-8 and took place during the Feast of Tabernacles. The second was during the Feast of Dedication and is described in John 9-10. The third trip was to the nearby village of Bethany, where He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). After performing that miracle, Jesus “went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim” (John 11:54). That is, He “was passing between Samaria and Galilee” (v.11), heading into Perea. All this helps us to picture the geographical setting, but precision is not important here.

As Jesus came to an unnamed village, “ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him” (v. 12). These men were keeping the Law. The Law was unmistakable, “²command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a dead person. ³You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst” (Numbers 5:2-3), and “⁴⁵as for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ ⁴⁶He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:45-46). Unlike the leper that came close enough that Jesus could touch him (Luke 5), these men obediently kept their distance. Lepers were not allowed within 150 feet of a healthy person if the wind was at their back. A strict rabbi would not eat an egg if bought on the street where a leper had recently passed. Throwing rocks at lepers to keep them at a distance was common practice. If a leper as much as put his or her head into a room, the entire dwelling became unclean.

The lepers were together because that was the only company they could get. When they saw Jesus, “they raised their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’” (v. 13). The word for master, *epistates*, is unique to Luke’s gospel, and is only used in reference to Jesus. Its use indicates an understanding of someone with power and authority. The cry “have mercy” is an admission of helplessness. These men know they have nothing to offer, no means to recommend themselves to Jesus. All they can do is cry for mercy.

It is amazing how quickly and loudly we cry for help when we recognize we are in distress. Our pride often keeps us from seeing our weakness, but when it is truly realized, we are quick to call out. Think of prayer. When we are confident and secure we feel no need to reach out to God, but send a crisis our way and we fall to our knees in an instant. In times of health and prosperity our prayers are cold and formal; mere shadows of what they ought to be. One phone call and we are broken and submissive.



On this particular occasion, Jesus worked differently than before, (Luke 5:13). He did not touch the lepers. He does not say “be cleansed.” Instead, “when He saw them, He said to them, ‘go and show yourselves to the priests.’” (v. 14). What did the men think? When Christ commands we must follow. We cannot dispute and reason. We are to simply obey.

We can wonder why Jesus acted this way? Scripture does not say, but perhaps He was testing their faith in Him to see if they truly believed He could heal. Perhaps He wanted to see them demonstrate obedience to fulfilling the Law’s requirements. The eight-day process of examinations and rituals by the priests would require them to be witnesses of the miracle. Perhaps Jesus wanted to include the priests in the miracle; the same priests who denied Him would be compelled to attest to His power.

For whatever reason, Jesus acted as He did, and His actions were perfect. With his usual tendency for understatement, Luke simply writes that “as they were going, they were cleansed” (v. 14). As they went they were healed. They felt their bodies restored. What a sensation that must have been! To sense your nerves again pulsating with feeling.

One Saved

These ten men had many similarities. They were all afflicted with leprosy. They all, presumably, wanted to be healed. They all cried out to Jesus, so it seems that they all believed He could heal them. They all also obeyed and went to the priests. And, of course, they were all healed. But that is where the similarities ended, for “one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back” (v.15). Scripture does not say how far they had gone, but it is likely they had not gone very far when one returned. He was not ignoring Jesus’ injunction to see the priests; he could go to the priest later.

All of these men were heading back to a normal life. All of them were returning to friends, families, and loved ones. All of them had the chance to resume their day-to-day activities, probably for the first time in years. But only one of them understood the profound implications of what had happened. From the actions that followed, it is clear this one man understood that Jesus was no mere rabbi.

In addition to returning to Jesus, the man did three things in response to being healed. First, he glorified “God with a loud voice” (v.15). The phrasing is similar to that used by Luke in describing Elizabeth’s joy at the visit from Mary, “⁴¹when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²And she cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!’” (Luke 1:41-42). It is also used by Luke in describing the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, “³⁷as soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, ³⁸shouting: ‘blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’” (Luke 19:37-38). The man had perhaps not been able to speak for years, but when he could, He glorified God.

Second, the man “fell on his face at His feet” (v. 16). This was an affirmation that he understood Jesus to be God. He recognized that this man was to be worshipped. Even Samaritans understood that God, alone, was to be worshipped. And finally, he gave “thanks to Him” (v. 16). There is no reason to assume that the other nine men would not give thanks to God in the temple, but this man had no need for rituals.

He had God Incarnate before him. By God's grace, he recognized that "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

Thankfulness is rare indeed. We are always more ready to ask God for more than to thank Him for what He has already done. This is a plain proof of our pride. A better sense of our own wretchedness would have us becoming more thankful.

The irony in all of this, of course, was that "he was a Samaritan" (v. 16). The Samaritans and Jews had a long history of animosity. So unusual was it for them to associate, that a woman from Samaria was surprised that Jesus wanted her to act as a servant to Him, "the Samaritan woman said to Him, 'how is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)" (John 4:9). In sending out the twelve disciples, Jesus had commanded them "do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6). And when Jesus had frustrated the Pharisees beyond what they could bear "the Jews answered and said to Him, 'do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" (John 8:48). To a good Jew, being a Samaritan and being demon-possessed were one and the same. That this man was a Samaritan and in the presence of Jews was attributable only to the fact that all were lepers.

Though this man returned to give glory to God and thankfully fall at His feet, Jesus was grieved. In response, Jesus "answered and said, 'were there not ten cleansed? But the nine - where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?'" (v. 17-18). The question was rhetorical. Jesus knew the answer. Still, Jesus was grieved because the Jews, who had received so many blessings, were being out done by Samaritans in praising God. One is reminded of the lament of the prophet Isaiah,

"¹Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
²He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.
³And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,
Judge between Me and My vineyard.
⁴What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?
Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?" (Isaiah 5:1-4).

The other nine, like the masses who were constantly 'amazed' to hear the words and see the works of Jesus, kept going. They had received their healing, and that was sufficient. Their bodies were cleansed so they had no concern for their souls. Had this Samaritan just simply turned around? Quite likely not. I think he must have made his intentions clear. I think he probably tried to persuade the others to go back as well. But to no avail. Like the masses, their issues were merely temporal. Like the masses, they

wanted someone to drive out their enemies, fill their bellies, and heal their diseases. To those crowds “²⁶Jesus answered them and said, ‘truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life’” (John 6:26-27).

Instead, this man, like Peter, “fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8). He wanted more than physical restoration, He wanted a Savior. And a Savior is what he found. Jesus “said to him, ‘stand up and go; your faith has made you well’” (v. 19). In the text, Luke does not use the word for ‘cleansed’ (v. 14) or ‘healed’ (v. 15). Instead, it is the word *sōzō*, which is used primarily in the New Testament to denote a person being saved from sin,

“And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:50).

“Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

“²³And someone said to Him, ‘Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?’ And He said to them, ²⁴‘strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able’” (Luke 13:23-24).

This is not a parable. Luke is recording an historical fact. But still, we can remark that the nine lepers are representative of the nation of Israel, who wanted only signs and wonders from Jesus. It is also representative of people today, many of whom are willing to receive the common grace God gives to all and be satisfied with that. God “causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45), and for some, that is enough. Instead may we cry out for more than that. May we hear the word of our Savior “your faith has made you well; go in peace” (Luke 8:48)

Takeaways

As we receive the many undeserved blessings each day from our gracious Heavenly Father, may we respond with gratitude and a recognition of His sovereignty over us.