

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Ten Lepers and Their Spiritual Leprosy.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse, and we find ourselves at **Luke 17:11**.

We're going to begin with a discussion of leprosy, which I know will be unpleasant to hear, because it was such a gruesome disease. But leprosy and its variants are mentioned [68 times in the Bible](#). The number of references alone make it worth understanding.

Also, regarding this morning's account, understanding leprosy will help us better understand:

- The lepers' desperation when they came to Jesus
- How dramatic and wonderful it really was for Jesus to heal them
- How thankful they should have been when Jesus healed them

Leprosy began as small, red spots on the skin. Before long the spots grew and turned white, with a shiny or scaly appearance. Then the spots would become dirty sores and ulcers because of the poor blood supply. The sores and ulcers would spread until they covered the body.

Lepers would lose feeling in affected areas, and without pain as a warning system they'd experience other injuries:

- They might twist an ankle but continue walking, worsening the tearing of the ligaments.
- If they were cooking with a fire, they wouldn't know if they got too close and burn themselves.
- Because they were forced to live away from civilization in unsanitary environments, they might not notice – and I'm not kidding – if rodents were chewing on them while they slept.

The body would start to fall apart:

- Hair would fall out.
- Fingernails and toenails would become loose and fall off.
- The joints of fingers and toes would rot until the fingers and toes themselves fell off.
- Gums would shrink until teeth fell out.
- The disease would affect the larynx, producing a grating quality in the leper's voice.
- The skin around the eyes and ears would begin to bunch, with deep furrows between the swellings, so the face started to look like that of a lion.
- Leprosy would eat away at the victim's face until their nose, palate, and even their eyes would rot away.
- Since lepers had parts of their bodies rotting, they put off a terrible odor.

These are only the physical consequences. There were spiritual, mental, and emotional consequences as well...

Spiritually, because lepers were unclean, they were removed from the religious life of the nation. Say goodbye to ever being able to corporately worship the Lord again.

Mentally leprosy was terrible because there was no cure. Lepers had to live with the reality that their condition would only get worse. As terrible as this week was, the next week would be even worse and the week after that even worse.

Emotionally leprosy was terrible because it meant the end of human relationships. Unless you want to risk your spouse, parents, children, siblings, or friends contracting leprosy you stayed away from them. All suffering is helped by the love and support of family and friends, but lepers couldn't even experience that.

Imagine this for a moment...

What if:

- You can never kiss your spouse again.

- You can never hug your children again.
- You can never hug your parents again.

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 Because lepers were like living dead people who could have no more relationships with others, there would be funerals for them while they were alive.<sup>i</sup>

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 Lepers became complete outcasts, shunned by the rest of society. The only relationships they had were with other lepers, but even this was painful, because the relationships served as constant reminders of the fate that awaited them: they had to watch other lepers rot away knowing the same would happen to them.

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 You could listen to this and think, “*Leprosy was so terrible wouldn’t everyone have pity on lepers?*”

No, and let me show you why. Briefly turn a few chapters to the left to **Luke 13**.

Look with me at verse one...

**Luke 13:1 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.**

Jesus was told Pilate murdered some Jews. If you were told this, how would you respond?

Wouldn’t you say something like:

- *This is terrible.*
- *I’m so sorry to hear this.*
- *What a horrible tragedy.*

Look how Jesus responded...

**Luke 13:2 And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**

Jesus knew the people were thinking the Galileans who were murdered were worse sinners than everyone else.

He says instead of worrying about the Galileans’ sins, they should be worried about their own sins and repent.

Look at **verse 4** to see Him make the same point again...

**Luke 13:4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”**

Apparently, there was a tower that fell and tragically killed 18 people.

Again, Jesus knew the thinking of the day would be that the people who were crushed by the tower must’ve been worse sinners than everyone else, so again He called everyone to repent.

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 Think about the man born blind...

**John 9:1 [The disciples] saw a man blind from birth. 2 And...asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”**

For this man to be born blind, someone must have sinned, whether the man or his parents.

**John 9:3** Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Jesus said this man’s blindness was not the result of anyone’s sin.

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Here’s the point...

If the thinking of the day is that people’s suffering is caused by their sin, what are people going to think about lepers who have a disease that causes unimaginable suffering?

They must have been terrible sinners.

So, no, people did not have pity on lepers.

If lepers ever approached people, it was viewed as a selfish act, because they were risking infecting others.

But, interestingly, lepers did seem comfortable approaching one Person. Look at **Luke 17:11**...

**Luke 17:11** 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

They wanted to be healed, but Jesus had **entered a village**. They knew they couldn’t follow, so they **stood at a distance**.

**Luke 17:13** and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

If nobody else had mercy on them, they thought Jesus would. And He did. Look at **verse 14**...

**Luke 17:14** When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed.

Notice Jesus didn’t cleanse the lepers immediately. It says **as they went they were cleansed**. I’m sure they wanted to be cleansed immediately, but they obeyed Jesus and headed to the priests.

When the lepers showed themselves to the priests they would be pronounced clean and then they could be restored to the religious and social life of the nation.

**Leviticus 14** also describes a ritual the priests were supposed to perform after people had been cleansed of leprosy. To be clear though:

- This wasn’t a ritual TO cleanse lepers
- This was a ritual performed AFTER lepers were cleansed

But because leprosy was incurable, how often do you think this ritual was performed?

There were only two instances in the Old Testament of leprosy being cleansed...

The first is in **Numbers 12** when Moses’s brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, attacked his leadership. God gave Miriam leprosy, but Moses interceded for her...

**Numbers 12:15** So Miriam was shut outside the camp seven days, and the people did not set out on the march till Miriam was brought in again.

It never says Miriam was cleansed, but the fact that she was brought back into the camp means she must've been cleansed. But there's no record of the ritual being performed.

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The other instance is with Naaman in **2 Kings 5**. It looks like he headed back to Syria after he was cleansed. It's highly unlikely that the commander of the Syrian Army, Israel's enemies, would've walked into the temple in Jerusalem and expected the Jewish priests to perform the ritual for him. Plus, he wouldn't have even known about the ritual unless Elisha told him to have it done, but there's no record of that.

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Considering these are the only recorded instances of leprosy being cleansed, and there's no record of the ritual ever being performed, it tells me that **Leviticus 14** must have been one of the most untouched chapters in the Old Testament.

But eight times in **Leviticus 14:4-19** it says **him who is to be cleansed**. God clearly expected people to be cleansed of leprosy, otherwise why have a ritual to be performed when lepers were cleansed?

But because leprosy was incurable why have a ritual for something that can't happen?

Any guesses?

To identify the Messiah's coming...and this brings us to Lesson One...

### Lesson One: Cleansing physical leprosy revealed Jesus is the Messiah.

Briefly turn to **Luke 7**. Here's the context...

John the Baptist is in prison, which would be discouraging, but he was able to be greatly encouraged by the prophecies about the Messiah setting captives free:

- **Isaiah 42:7 [The Messiah will] bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.** John knows this is him.
- **Psalms 146:7 The Lord sets the prisoners free.** John can't wait to be set free.
- Not long ago, Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read from the prophet **Isaiah: Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES and...SET AT LIBERTY THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED.** John is a captive who can't wait to be liberated.

He is a perfect candidate for deliverance under the Messiah's ministry. And not only that, he's the Messiah's forerunner. So...

- If there's anyone the Messiah should release...
- If there's anyone who should be out there ministering...

It's John!

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But then something happened...or you could say something DIDN'T happen...

- John wasn't being released.
- The days kept stretching on...and on...and on.

Finally, it even reached the point that he started wondering if Jesus was the Messiah at all.

But here's the question...

Jesus was going to deliver people, but would it be a physical deliverance or a spiritual deliverance?

- He wasn't going to deliver people from physical imprisonment.
- But He was going to deliver people from sin and death.

But John lost sight of this, so look what happened in **verse 18**...

**Luke 7:18 The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, 19 calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”**

John the Baptist began to wonder if Jesus was the Messiah, because it seems like the prophecies weren't true.

Now I want you to notice the interesting way Jesus answered John's question. He didn't tell John's messengers to tell John that He's the Messiah, because anyone can claim to be the Messiah. Instead, He told John's messengers to tell John what they were seeing. Look at **verse 20**...

**Luke 7:20 And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” 21 In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. 22 And he answered them, “Go and tell John WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN AND HEARD: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, LEPERS ARE CLEANSED, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”**

Jesus told John's messengers that lepers' cleansing of served as evidence that the Messiah had come.

There are only two accounts of Jesus cleansing lepers and both times He sent them to the priests, because they were the experts in the law who would be able to declare they were cleansed. They had the credibility to do so. A layperson could say, “My brother had leprosy, but he's been cleansed,” and people wouldn't believe it. But when priests declared that lepers were cleansed, people believed it.

And just think of what this was like for the priests in Jesus's day...

You have two thousand years from the time the law was given to Moses with this ritual and ZERO lepers ever showed up for the ritual to be performed. Then there are rumors that the Messiah has come. You are a priest, so you wonder if it is true. Then lepers start showing up having been cleansed of leprosy and you are able to perform the ritual that no priest ever performed before. It would have been an incredible testimony that the Messiah had come.

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One more thing...

I mentioned the two instances of leprosy being cleansed in the Old Testament – Miriam and Naaman – and they were associated with Moses and Elisha, two of the greatest men in the Old Testament. In both instances it was clear God did the cleansing...

Moses prayed that God would cleanse his sister Miriam, because Moses was not able to do it himself.

Naaman understood God cleansed him, because listen to what he said when he returned to Elisha...

**2 Kings 5:15 [Naaman] returned to [Elisha] and said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.”**

Naaman praised God because he knew He was the One who cleansed him.

Here's my point...

If Moses and Elisha couldn't cleanse leprosy, but a leper goes to the priests and says, “Jesus of Nazareth cleansed my leprosy,” it communicated someone greater than Moses and Elisha had come...and that Man would be the Messiah.

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Now back to the account. After the lepers showed themselves to the priests, look what happened...

**Luke 17:15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice;**

Leprosy destroyed people's voices, but he was cleansed so he came **back, praising God with a loud voice.**

**Luke 17:16 and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.**

As you know, the Jews hated the Samaritans. They were considered half-breeds and not full Israelites after intermarrying with Assyrians seven centuries earlier.

But Luke is the Gentile, or non-Jewish author of Scripture, and he made the Samaritans look better than anyone else. He recorded the parable of the good Samaritan.

**Luke 17:17 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?"**

Only one of the ten gave thanks and Jesus noticed...and this brings us to Lesson Two...

### **Lesson Two: Jesus notices thanklessness and thankfulness.**

Jesus noticed two things:

- He noticed the thanklessness of the nine who didn't return, and it bothered Him.<sup>ii</sup>
- He noticed the thankfulness of the one who did return, and it pleased Him.

We know Romans 1 is one of the strongest declarations of men's wickedness in Scripture. Interestingly, listen to this...

**Romans 1:21 Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God OR GIVE THANKS TO HIM, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

The reason I find this interesting is if we think of God condemning men, we probably think in terms of commission versus omission:

- We think of the sins men commit, such as lying, stealing, and murdering
- Versus the sin of omission, which is when we fail to do what God wants us to do

In this passage condemning men, God points out one of our main sins of omission: not giving Him thanks.

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Ingratitude is especially prevalent today when people have an "I deserve this" mentality.

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We might be quick to condemn the nine lepers who didn't return, but I wonder if the ratio of people who give thanks to the LORD is any greater today?

I will be the first to say that:

- I definitely don't give thanks to God for all the things I should
- Way too often I'm more like the nine than the one.

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Matthew Henry says we always have things to be thankful for. He listed things he was thankful for after being robbed...yes, you heard me correctly:<sup>iii</sup>

1. First, he thanked God that he had never been robbed before.
2. Second, he thanked God that even though they took his wallet, they didn't take his life.

3. Third, he thanked God that even though they took his wallet and all that was in it, it wasn't very much.
4. Finally, he thanked God that he was the one being robbed versus the one doing the robbing.

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Now as I have told you many times before, most of what Jesus did physically is a picture of what He wants to do for us spiritually. If you don't understand this, you end up like charismatic churches who believe Jesus wants to heal everything.

For example:

- When Jesus healed blindness: That's not supposed to make us think He wants to heal every blind person. But He wants to heal our spiritual blindness so we can spiritually see.
- When Jesus healed deafness: That's not supposed to make us think He heals every deaf person. But He wants to heal our spiritual deafness so we can understand spiritual truths.
- When Jesus raised people from the dead: That's not supposed to make us think He'll raise us the moment we die. But He has victory over sin and death, and He wants to give us eternal life.

The point is, when we see what Jesus did physically we often want to look at it spiritually.

Now in this account when Jesus cleansed physical leprosy, what is going on?

This is one of the easiest ones to figure out because of what leprosy represents: sin. And this brings us to lesson three...

### **Lesson Three: Leprosy is a picture of sin.**

Please mark your spot in **Luke 17** and turn to **Leviticus 13**.

Leprosy is the most dramatic picture or type of sin in the Bible. Let me say it like this: leprosy did to people physically what sin does to us spiritually. Let me share the parallels...

Leprosy is deeper than the skin, like sin...

**Leviticus 13:3 and the priest shall examine the diseased area on the skin of his body. And if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be DEEPER THAN THE SKIN OF HIS BODY, it is a case of leprous disease. When the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him unclean.**

Leprosy spreads like sin...

**Leviticus 13:7 But if the eruption SPREADS IN THE SKIN, after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest.**

Lepers mourned over their leprosy, like we should mourn over our sin...

**Leviticus 13:45a "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip or mustache**

Pause here. They were to tear their clothes and ignore their hair, which were common signs of mourning.

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Leprosy defiles, like sin...

**Leviticus 13:45b and cry out, 'UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN.' 46 He shall remain UNCLEAN as long as he has the disease. He is UNCLEAN.**

Pause here. The word unclean occurs four times in two verses. Lepers were made unclean by their leprosy like we're made unclean by our sin.

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Lepers had to be removed from everyone except other lepers, just like unrepentant sinners must be removed from everyone except other unrepentant sinners...

**Leviticus 13:46b he shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.**

Leprosy isolates like sin isolates.

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Just like unrepentant people affected by sin are fit for the fires of hell, objects affected by leprosy are fit for the fire...

**Leviticus 13:52 And he shall BURN the garment, or the warp or the woof, the wool or the linen, or any article made of skin that is diseased, for it is a persistent leprous disease. It shall be BURNED IN THE FIRE...57 Then if it appears again in the garment, in the warp or the woof, or in any article made of skin, it is spreading. You shall BURN WITH FIRE whatever has the disease.**

Let me share a few more ways leprosy resembles sin...

Leprosy started out small and unnoticeable, but then it grew until it couldn't be hidden...just like sin.

Leprosy could never be completely removed from a person's life, just like sin can never be completely removed from our lives.

As leprosy spreads, sensitivity and feeling in the area are lost, just like the numbness or loss of conviction Paul described sin causing when it spreads:

- **Ephesians 4:19 (NKJV) [Sinners], who, BEING PAST FEELING, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.**
- **1 Timothy 4:2 Through the insincerity of liars whose CONSCIENCES ARE SEARED,**

When lepers lost feeling they were likely to hurt themselves worse, just like when we lose feeling or conviction, we're likely to hurt ourselves worse.

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People with leprosy were like living dead people...

What are unsaved people?

They are physically alive, but spiritually dead, so they are living dead people...like lepers:

- **Ephesians 2:1 You WERE DEAD in the trespasses and sins**
- **Colossians 2:13 You, who WERE DEAD in your trespasses...God made alive**

Leprosy never stopped until the person was dead, just like sin never stops until we're dead.

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With all this in mind, look at **Luke 17:19** to see a beautiful picture of spiritual leprosy being cleansed...

**Luke 17:19 And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."**

This looks confusing at first, because Jesus told this man that his faith had made him well...AFTER Jesus had already made him well by cleansing his leprosy.

Here's what's going on:

- Earlier Jesus cleansed his physical leprosy

- Now Jesus cleansed his spiritual leprosy

He came back in faith, and we're saved by grace through faith. This is why numerous translations point out that he was saved:

- The NASB and ESV have footnotes that say **your faith has made you well means your faith has saved you.**
- The Amplified says **Jesus said to him, "Get up and go [on your way]. Your faith [your personal trust in Me and your confidence in God's power] has restored you to health."**

So, ten of the lepers were cleansed of their physical leprosy, but only one of them was cleansed of his spiritual leprosy.

This brings us to Lesson Four...

#### Lesson Four: Jesus wants to cleanse our spiritual leprosy.

Jesus healed blindness, paralysis, sickness, deafness...and the list could go on. These miracles are called healings, but lepers were cleansed:

- **Luke 7:22 "Tell John what you have seen and heard...LEPERS ARE CLEANSED.**
- **Luke 17:14 When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were CLEANSED.**
- **Luke 17:17 Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten CLEANSED? Where are the nine?"**

This is another way leprosy is a picture of sin...

Leprosy can't be healed, just like sin can't be healed. But Jesus could cleanse lepers of leprosy, just like He can cleanse us of spiritual leprosy.

Listen to these verses:

- **Titus 2:14 (HCSB) He gave Himself...to CLEANSE FOR HIMSELF a people for His own possession.**
- **Ephesians 5:26 that he might sanctify her, having CLEANSED HER by the washing of water with the word.**
- **1 John 1:7 The blood of Jesus...CLEANSES US FROM ALL SIN...9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to CLEANSE US from all unrighteousness.**

Let me ask you this...

What was the greatest cleansing Jesus did in this account?

- Was it what He did for all ten lepers?
- O was it what He did for the one leper with faith?

What He did for the one leper was greater, and what Jesus has done for us is greater than what He did for the nine lepers who didn't return. He cleansed them physically, something that would benefit them for the rest of their earthly lives, but He has cleansed us spiritually, something that will affect us for eternity.

We have something worse than physical leprosy, and that is our sin. We should be even more thankful for Jesus cleansing us of our spiritual leprosy than the lepers were of Jesus cleansing them of physical leprosy, because physical leprosy doesn't cast you into hell for all eternity.

How often are you thanking Christ for the cleansing His blood provided on the cross?

**Let me conclude with this...**

Maybe you had sin in your life that started out as a few spots. It wasn't noticeable at first, but now:

- It has spread.
- It has affected your whole life.
- It has become noticeable to those around you.
- People can see it in your life.
- They can hear it in your voice.
- It has started to stink.

I want to tell you Jesus is as willing to cleanse you of spiritual leprosy today as He was 2,000 years ago.

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If you have any questions about anything I've shared directly pray for you in any way I will be up front after service and it would be a privilege to speak with you. Let's pray.

<sup>i</sup> **Leviticus 13** discusses the steps for dealing with people who had leprosy:

- They were brought to the priests for examination.
- If they showed any signs, they were pronounced unclean and isolated for seven days.
- Then they were brought back and re-examined to see if they improved:
  - If they improved, it was clear they didn't have leprosy, because leprosy never improved. They would be pronounced clean and restored to fellowship
  - If they hadn't improved, they would be isolated and re-examined another seven days later.

When it was obvious people were lepers there was no future examination. At that point they were required to take steps to make it obvious they were lepers to help prevent the spread of the disease...

**Leviticus 13:46b He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.**

<sup>ii</sup> Interestingly, the nine who didn't return had much going for them:

- They had been obedient.
- They had trusted Jesus and went in faith.

But their thanklessness is what He mentioned. It seemed to spoil the event for Him.

It would seem that even obedience and faith can't make up for the lack of gratitude in a heart.

<sup>iii</sup> Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations [Assurance Publishers], by Paul Lee Tan, # 6578.