

At the Feet of Jesus

Luke 17.11-19

Introduction

Have you ever experienced something so powerful and moving that it changed your perspective on things? I have... I remember the first time that happened to me. I was still a young boy, and my parents took me to the Grand Canyon. I'll *never forget* the first glimpse I got of the Canyon. It was amazing! That was the *first time in my life* I can remember *really* being in awe and being confronted with the power of God.

Well our passage from the Gospel of Luke tells the story of *ten* men who encountered God's power and love in a very real way. Jesus miraculously healed all ten of them. But *only one* truly grasped just how life-changing his encounter with Jesus really was.

Now, as we take a look at this story together this evening, here's the main point I want you to take from it: *The healing power of Jesus Christ is great enough to fully cleanse and restore the most unclean and defiled of people.* I've divided the story into 3 parts, which will make up the outline of the sermon: 1. The Encounter of the Ten—verses 11-14. 2. The Return of the One—verses 15-16. 3. The Response of the Great High Priest—verses 17-19.

The Encounter of the Ten: verses 11-14.

Now, Luke starts off by telling us that this event occurred while Jesus was "On the way to Jerusalem." And back in 9.51, Luke wrote that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." So here in 17.11 he's reminding us that that's still ultimately where Jesus is headed. He's is continuing in his journey toward Jerusalem in order to fulfill his mission.

But, at this point we see that he's traveling *between* the regions of Samaria and Galilee. And that's actually pretty significant. You see, in Palestine, Galilee is to the north, Samaria to the south of Galilee, and Jerusalem is in Judea to the south of Samaria. So normally, if you were taking a direct route to Jerusalem from Galilee, you'd just travel directly south and cross over the border into Samaria. But here Jesus, on his way South to Jerusalem, is going *between* Samaria and Galilee, following along their borders.

So he makes a purposeful decision to go out of his way. And he enters this unnamed village with his disciples. And He's met there by these ten lepers. On the surface it's a *seemingly* chance meeting.

But we know that nothing Jesus did was by chance. There was purpose in every route he took and in every encounter he had with people. He knew he was going to meet this group of lepers when he chose to enter this town. And it's because he *wanted* to see them that he went there at all.

Now, let me just dwell on that a bit. What we see here is the *King of kings* going out of his way to meet a group of *anonymous lepers* on the outskirts of a *little known* town between

Galilee and Samaria. Sure, he could've just figured out precisely how long it'd take him to get to Jerusalem by the Passover if he took a straight path from Nazareth. Kind of like we all would've done if we were him. But He didn't do that. He *never* did that.

He came to seek and to save the lost, the poor, the broken, the diseased. And friends, he's still seeking them and saving them, and he's doing it through his church. And *He invites us*, broken vessels though we are, to join him in this mission.

And whether they respond rightly or not isn't the issue. Our mission as the church is the same regardless of how people respond to it. In fact, what we see in this story is that *only one* out of the ten responds rightly to the love and mercy of *Jesus himself*. But Jesus still healed them all anyway.

So let us as his people go out of our way for the sake of others, *especially* the least and the outcast. We should be *looking for* ways to reach the broken of this world with the mercy of Christ, as Christ himself did.

But, turning back to our text, we see that these 10 men are in a *shameful* condition. They're lepers. And their condition is shameful not only because they're diseased, but also because in Judaism the disease of leprosy required that they be cut off from society and forbidden from Temple worship.

And so, they're at the outskirts of this unknown town, keeping their distance from other people because the ceremonial law in Leviticus declared them unclean. Leviticus 13.45-46...

Now, *Could you imagine* the *shame* involved in being a leper in this context? You had to wear torn clothes, let the hair of your head hang loose, cry out declaring your uncleanness, live alone and far away from other people.

And it's because of all this that these 10 lepers are standing far off from Jesus, and crying out from a *distance* for him to have mercy on them. They do see some hope that he might heal them. And they recognize something of his spiritual authority. They call him "Master." But because of the law and because of their shame, they don't presume to even approach him.

And Jesus, after he notices the lepers and hears their request, tells them to go show themselves to the priests. Now, when he says this it's in reference to the leprosy laws in Leviticus. But it's important to notice that there's actually some ambiguity to what he tells them to do here.

You see, in every other account of Jesus' healing of a leper, like earlier in Luke chapter 5, Jesus heals him *immediately* and *then* tells him to go to the priest and to offer the gift commanded by Moses for the cleansing.

But here in Luke 17, the lepers *aren't* healed immediately, and Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests *before* he heals them. And unlike *every other one* of the accounts of his healing of a leper in the Gospels, Jesus doesn't mention *anything* to these ten men about taking the offering commanded by Moses for the cleansing.

So what's going on here? Why is this time so different? Well, I'd suggest that Jesus is actually giving them a *purposely ambiguous* commandment in order to test their faith in him.

You see, there're two sets of laws for lepers in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus 13 has laws for the *initial examination* of lepers. But chapter 14, on the other hand, has laws for the *ritual cleansing* of lepers who've *already been healed*.

And in Jesus' other healings of lepers he always makes reference clearly to Leviticus 14. Because he tells the leper to go to the priest with an offering for ritual cleansing *after* he heals him. But here in Luke 17 he gives the command to go to the priest *before* the healing, and he doesn't say anything about taking an offering.

And so, when Jesus tells these guys to show themselves to the priests, it's actually unclear which set of laws he has in mind—Leviticus 13 or Leviticus 14. The question's left open as to whether he's telling them to undergo ritual cleansing on account of the healing he was going to perform, or whether they were to simply be examined by the priests.

Now, of course, Jesus intended all along to heal them. I'm not questioning that at all. But he tests their willingness to obey his directions *regardless* of what they may have thought expedient.

Well, at any rate, the ten lepers don't get hung up on the details. Their case is much too dire to start asking questions for clarification. They don't say, "Uh, Jesus, couldn't you just heal us first and then tell us *exactly* what to do?" No. They just obey him and go on their way. And they're *healed* as they're going away from Jesus, during their act of obedience.

The Return of the One: verses 15-16

But even though *all ten* were healed, we find out in verses 15-16 that *only one* of them returned to Jesus. They all had some conception of Jesus' authority. And so they all followed his command to go to the priests; just as earlier they all called him Master. But *only one* "saw" that he was healed and turned back to Jesus. *Only One*.

And notice there's a shift from "cleansed" in verse 14 to "healed" in verse 15. These two words together emphasize the holistic nature of the healing. The fact that the leprosy was *cleansed* brings into focus the context of ritual purity and Temple worship, while the fact that he was *healed* emphasizes his physical restoration.

So, Christ healed this leper *both* physically *and* spiritually. He both healed him of his disease and he also brought him to a restored relationship with God. In other words, Jesus perfectly performed the work of a priest *himself* while they were on their way to the priests!

And we see the *revolutionary* impact this had on this man in the way he responded to the healing. While all ten lepers were healed of their disease, this one is distinguished from the other nine in his *response* of seeing, turning, and praising.

And then in verse 16, in stark contrast to the scene at the opening of our passage where the ten lepers were standing off at a distance, this man now has the *boldness* to approach Jesus. And once he does, he falls at his feet.

And so, while the other nine continue to move further away from Jesus, the one who “saw” that he was healed gets as close to him as he can. You see, he realized that he wasn’t prohibited anymore from approaching and embracing other people. And now that he’s restored to a place of dignity before God and men, he runs back to the source of his healing and falls at the Jesus’ feet.

He saw the presence of God in Christ, and he was therefore compelled in his praising *God* not to go and give thanks at the Temple, but to worship and give thanks at the *feet* of this humble Jewish man from Nazareth. *He saw* that this Jesus was *surely* more than just a prophet or a great spiritual leader.

And then Luke throws in a pretty significant detail at the end of verse 16, almost in passing.... “*He was a Samaritan.*” He wasn’t *only* a leper. He was a *Samaritan* leper. And so, he would’ve been considered *doubly outcast* in the eyes of the first century Jew.

To put it mildly, Jews didn’t like Samaritans very much. They had such disgust for them that they generally wouldn’t deal with them. John 4.9 says it plainly—“Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”

And there were serious differences regarding Temple worship and priesthood that divided Jews and Samaritans. You see, Samaritans had their own priesthood and their own Temple located at Mount Gerazim in Samaria and not in Jerusalem. And these differences struck at the very heart of their respective national identities.

And so, by noting that this man was a Samaritan at this late stage in the story, Luke dramatically illuminates what we’ve read up to this point. The division between Jews and Samaritans and all those questions about the priesthood and Temple worship that came along with that division were *in the process* of being *torn down* by Jesus.

To which temple and to which priests was this Samaritan leper to go when Jesus gave the order? Should he have gone to Mount Gerazim, to his own temple and his own priests? Or should he have gone to Jerusalem, and by doing so betray his own heritage?

No doubt this question perplexed him when he heard the simple command, “*Go show yourself to the priests.*” But once he realized the *power of God* manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, he came to the right conclusion: he was to go back to the one who gave the command in the first place—to *the one Priest* who could heal a *leprous Samaritan both physically and spiritually*.

He saw that *Jesus* must have been much greater than anything *either* in Jerusalem *or* on Mount Gerazim, *or anywhere else* for that matter! And once he realized *this*, he simply *could not* go anywhere else.

So friends, *Jesus* is the true Priest in our text! He’s not simply *a* priest, or *one of* the priests, but he’s *THE* PRIEST.

The Response of the Great High Priest: vv. 17-19

And in verses 17-19, the Great High Priest responds to the actions of the Samaritan. Now *does his response confirm* the conclusion that he’s the true Priest and the fulfillment of everything the Temple and the priesthood pointed toward? *Yes, it does.*

Notice that Jesus doesn’t chastise the Samaritan for returning to him. He doesn’t say, “*Hey! What’re you doing? I thought I told you to go show yourself to the priests.*” No, he doesn’t do that because he was all along testing their faith *in him*.

If they were healed, would the ten lepers only be concerned about obeying the letter of the old ceremonial law? Would they keep clinging to their old wineskins? *Or* would they realize the new thing God was doing in Jesus and turn back to him? Would they continue on to the priests? *Or* would they return to the Great High Priest—the *One to whom* the entire Levitical code pointed?

Well, the other nine did continue on to the priests who served in Jerusalem. *Were they wrong?* I mean, they were just doing what Jesus told them to do, right? So, at first glance we might be tempted to say, “*Hey, wait a minute Jesus. They’re just doing what you told them to do. You can’t expect any more than that!*”

But notice Jesus’ sense of disappointment: “*Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return to give praise to God except this foreigner?*”

So, even though the nine were just doing what they were told to do, there was something about their actions that wasn’t quite right. They were obedient, yeah. But even so, they didn’t *really* honor God in their obedience.

Friends, outward obedience alone without faith in Jesus and true love for him is in the grand scheme of things *utterly* meaningless. The nine *did* what Jesus told them to *do*, yes. But they *didn’t realize* just who Jesus *was*. If they did, they would’ve returned to worship him along with the Samaritan.

But they missed that there was *something more* to be *seen, something more* to be *done*, and *something* to be *given and received* that went beyond the *mere letter* of the law. And ironically, it was the *Samaritan*—the outcast *among* the outcasts—who *saw* just what this was.

You see, now that God's kingdom has come in the person of Jesus Christ, the movement of faith and gratitude *toward him* is what's required for God to be glorified! And Jesus seems shocked that it's a *foreigner* of all people who was the only one to realize this.

Interesting... the word in verse 18 that's translated "foreigner." The word is *allogenes*. It could be translated "*other-born*." And this is actually the only place it's used in the New Testament.

But it would've been familiar to anyone who visited the Temple in Jerusalem. Because, you see, it was inscribed on the Temple wall at the point where everyone except pure Jews was prohibited from entering.

And so, Jesus' use of this *particular* word here highlights the fact that this Samaritan was actually someone who would've been considered an outcast to the people of God *with or without* leprosy. He was forbidden the privilege of full temple worship *both* because of his disease *and* because of his race.

But thanks to this seemingly chance meeting with the Savior who came to unite Jews, Samaritans, and people from the whole world into one Body by his work of redemption, this *twice outcast* Samaritan leper is now *graciously brought* into the very *presence of God* at the feet of Jesus!

And as Jesus *fixes his gaze* upon the Samaritan man, he gives him another command—"*Rise and go your way*." Not, "*Rise and show yourself to the priests*." But simply, "*Rise and go your way*."

Where was he to go? We're not told. Perhaps he did eventually make his way to the priests. But there's no indication that Jesus expected him to do so.

And finally, Jesus speaks to him those wonderful words of hope: "*Your faith has made you well*." And so, we've now moved in the description of what's been done for this man from *cleansed* in verse 14, to *healed* in verse 15, to *made well*, or in some other translations—perhaps more accurately—*saved*, in verse 19.

And this movement from *cleansed*, to *healed*, to *saved* progressively reveals the restoration of the entire person. You see, it wasn't just the skin disease that was healed or the fact that his place in society was restored, but Jesus also completely restored him to a right relationship with God.

And this is vividly portrayed for us as we see the Samaritan man lying at the feet of the *Lord of all the earth, praising God*, and hearing those wonderful words of grace, "*Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.*"

He found—*at the feet of Jesus*—the place where God is to be worshipped by everyone—*including even 1st century Samaritan lepers*. And yes, also 21st century materialistic Americans. And because of this he was cleansed, healed, and reconciled to God.

And he no longer needed to search for answers to those perplexing questions about who had the right priesthood, or where the proper place to worship God may have been. He found the answer to all these things in the person of a humble Jew from Nazareth.

Conclusion

Now, What about you? I assure you, dear friends, *we're all of us Samaritan lepers here today*. We're all alienated from God apart from Christ. We're all by nature doubly outcast because of both the guilt and the corruption of our sin.

Have you cried out to Jesus for mercy and healing?

I do fear that even as Christians we can easily tend to forget that this is our *daily* calling. We're to *daily* die to ourselves and cry out to him to heal us. *Do you continually* bring your shame, your guilt, your uncleanness to Jesus? Or *do you* keep your distance from him?

Is there anything in your life that may be keeping you from him? Is there any *lingering leprosy* that might be causing you to remain with the crowds far off from him? *Have you forgotten* that he is your life? Have you lost the sense of awe you once had over his power and his grace? If so, *then turn back to him!* Turn from whatever else you're running toward and run back to him!

Your salvation isn't just a once and done deal. It began at a point, but it continues throughout your life. Our entire lives are to be lived at the feet of Jesus, as living sacrifices *slain* on the altar of his grace.

And only as we stay close to him will we be able to follow his example and love as he loved. Only as we remember that we're by nature rebellious outcasts who have nothing apart from Jesus will we be able to live our lives freely out of unreserved love for God and our neighbor, as Christ calls us to.

May God grant us all the grace to never forget our need for him.