

The Tenth Leper

READING: Luke 17

- I asked for Luke 17 to be read this morning, because I want to draw your attention to Verses 11 to 19
- Luke 17:11-19
 - 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."
- It seems like a fairly straightforward Parable, so I've always breezed right through it, without paying much attention
- But, this morning I want to take a moment and really think about what's happening here...
- We start with ten men who have the worst disease of their day
- The physical ramifications are horrendous
- Leprosy attacks the body, leaving sores, missing fingers, missing toes, and damaged limbs
- In many cases, the initial pain of leprosy gives way to something more terrible than that - a loss of sensation in nerve endings, leading to even more damage to even more body parts
- The disease can take 30 years to run its course, and in that time span, entire limbs can simply fall off

- Now, try to imagine what it was like 2,000 years ago, when medical treatment as we know it today was almost non-existent
- People who visit leper colonies say that one thing sticks in their mind the most...
- The smell
- Many lepers have decaying flesh on their body and the smell of putrefaction is intense
- Now, think of how bad this disease must have been in the days of Christ
- It wasn't just the attack to your sight with the grotesque damage
- It wasn't just the attack to your hearing with the loud cries
- It wasn't just the attack to your sense of smell, with the rotting, decaying flesh
- The emotional pain of a leper, however, must have been even worse than the physical pain
- He was removed from his family, and from his community
- There could be no contact, whatsoever, with his children or grandchildren
- None
- They would often be immediately removed from the village, and their spouse would not even be allowed to kiss them goodbye
- Lepers tended to roam together, looking for food, and begging for assistance
- But, they did everything from a great distance, learning to yell in loud voices, both from the need to warn others, and to beg for help from people who didn't dare get near
- What would it have been like to have been removed from friends and family for a lifetime, and to have been forced to announce that separation on a daily basis?
- So, in this account, a group of ten lepers encounter Jesus, and hear him say the most unusual thing
- In Verse 13, we see them yelling at Jesus, "Have mercy on us!"

- “We want to be well!” they scream at Jesus
- And in Verse 14 the master responds, "Go and show yourselves to the priest."
- The local priest had duties other than leading worship on each Sabbath
- He was also something of a local health official
- If a person was miraculously healed of leprosy, it was up to the priest to inspect the body, to test for a complete removal of the disease, and to announce the person healed
- In such cases, the person would have been cleansed, and at that point, it would be okay for the leper to see his wife again, to hold his children again, to look for work again
- If the priest gave him the OK, he would be healed!
- Now, Jesus says to these lepers, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."
- Huh?
- They look down at their bodies
- The hands of one man are still mangled
- Another man looks at his leg, which ends halfway down with a filthy rag at the knee
- Another looks at his skin, and finds it just as repulsive as ever
- In other words, all of these men were no better off than they had been ten minutes earlier, when they had first spotted the famous teacher
- But, look what they do... at the end of Verse 14
- They headed off in search of the priest
- And on their way, they were healed – on their way!
- On their way, a hand reappeared, and tingled with life
- A crutch tripped on a filthy rag, as it fell to the ground

- The leg was back, healthy, whole, complete
- The skin cleared up, and the tiny hairs on the forearm turned from snow white to brown
- One looked at the other, another one looked at the rest, and the screaming started
- The smiles broke into cheering, and a sweet madness
- They raced off in the distance, not believing that the nightmare was finally over
- But in order for the miracle to happen, these men had to start **walking in faith** before their circumstances had changed one tiny bit
- That's an important lesson for us
- You can't wait until the problems are over to start **walking in faith**
- You can't put conditions on God
- You can't say, "Lord, as soon as my money problems are straightened out, I will follow you."
- You can't say, "Lord, once this issue with my family is resolved, I'll start going back to meeting."
- You can't put conditions on God!
- Instead, God places a demand for faith from us, before anything at all has changed
- God might say, "Love me despite the disease."
- God might say, "Obey me despite the lack of ability."
- God might say, "Serve me despite the lack of resources."
- God might say, "Follow me despite the depression."
- That is the nature of God, a God who loves you so much, He'll give you the opportunity to be thankful when nothing about your circumstances gives you that motivation to be so
- That is the very definition of faith

- If you praised God only on the good days, only in the best of circumstances, it would not be faith at all
- I imagine that some of you are in terrible circumstances, right now
- So, I'm kind of asking you the question
- Will you be thankful to God despite the difficult circumstances?
- If so, then you will have exercised your faith
- Notice in Verse 15 that one of the men came back to Jesus, and praised God
- He was Thankful
- He was public about it
- He was loud!
- He wasn't shy at all
- Did you ever wonder why he was so loud?
- This guy had been forced to yell for as long as he'd had leprosy
- Had it been years?
- He'd probably yelled so long, he didn't know how to speak quietly, or even in a normal voice
- When he came back and fell at the feet of Jesus, he was louder than the normal person, and he was praising God
- This is another great lesson for us!
- Be sure you take time to acknowledge God for his goodness
- Be sure to actually be Thankful!
- And, don't be shy about it!
- Be loud!

- Gather everyone together for a prayer of Thankfulness
- Only one healed leper came back
- Only one caught himself in the midst of the celebration, and returned to Jesus
- He reversed his steps, put his family on hold, put the priest on hold, and came back to the cause of his celebration
- His response and life situation were unique, but in the simplest sense of what he did his thankfulness led to action
- And it turned out to be very important!
- In Verse 17 Jesus asks, "Where are the other nine?"
- Did you ever think about what Jesus meant when he said this?
- Jesus had just said, "Go, and show yourselves to the priests"
- Jesus had never commanded that any of them needed to express thankfulness to God
- Jesus had never said that they should return to him, their healer
- Nevertheless, it appears that is what Jesus expected
- Which makes me think, what kind of action is Jesus expecting from me?
- Sure, I might say a nice prayer of Thankfulness, but what action am I doing in my life that shows my Thankfulness
- Not everything that we should do is a commandment
- Jesus expects certain actions from us, even if they aren't explicitly commanded
- If we say that we are Thankful, and don't exhibit that in our daily lives, then it really begs the question, "Are we really Thankful?"
- Based on what Jesus was looking for 2,000 years ago, the best advice is to take that step of action

- Don't just say you are Thankful, but look for ways in your life to express that in Godly actions towards others
- Now, let's look at the last verse, Verse 19
- Or, more specifically, let's look at one more word
- In Verse 19, Jesus says to this very thankful man, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."
- "Made you **well**"
- That's an interesting word
- It's not a medical word, necessarily
- The Greek Word there, So-zo, really means "Saved"
- The Greeks used it for people who had escaped dangerous situations
- Sailors who survived a storm at sea and had been saved, would say, "So-zo"
- In Matthew 1:21, the angel told Joseph to name the Christ child "Jesus," because that name meant that he would "save his people from their sins"
- He would "so-zo" the people
- In Romans 10:9, when Paul described what would happen to a person who publicly professed Jesus as Lord, he used this same word, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
- You will be "so-zo"
- And now Jesus uses this word in Verse 19 to say to this thankful man willing to follow God before his circumstances changed – who remembered to return to Jesus and worship God before he returned home - Jesus pronounces a complete healing on this man, a wellness that surpasses any medical wellness term
- This man's faith, Jesus said, has saved him

- Did you notice in verse 17 that Jesus said that all 10 were cleansed?
- The wonderful work of Jesus can cleanse us ALL from our sins
- But, only to the Tenth Leper does Jesus say that his Faith had truly saved him
- It's the Faith of the Tenth Leper that saved him
- And, it's our faith that saves us!