

JESUS AND THE TEN LEPERS LUKE 17: 11-19

They say that in times of flood, you will find wild animals trapped together on high ground, and they are not attacking each other. In times of tragedy, all normal social barriers are removed. When fire or flood, or earthquake strike, it does not really matter how rich or poor you are. Tragedy draws people together.

Tragedy had brought this band of lepers together. It appears there were nine Jews, and one Samaritan in this band. They would have been forced to live on the outskirts of the town because they were considered infectious. They would not be able to have close contact with anyone. If they approached someone, they had to cry out leper. Terrible situation. Word leprosy can refer to Hansen's disease but also to a range of other infectious diseases.

We can learn in this story from two key areas. One is about faith; the other is about gratitude/ thankfulness

The first lesson is around faith, which is a word we bandy around a lot in Christian circles. We use it in lots of different ways.

The Bible defines faith as being "sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"

If you think about it, anyone can have faith. You do not have to be a Christian to have faith. In addition, your faith can be in anything. You can be hopeful that there are aliens in space and certain of them, even though you cannot see them. Therefore, we see in this little story three aspects of faith

1. Faith means stepping into the unknown.

Jesus told them to see the high priest. According to Leviticus, this is what you had to do before you were declared clean free from infection. He acted as the health inspector.

When Jesus told them to visit the High Priest, they were not healed. They had to make a decision to start travelling in that direction. It says that as they were on their way they were healed. That is a faith action. They could look at their bodies and know they were not healed. They had to believe in something they could not yet see. And they had to take action on that. They had to take action on the words of Jesus alone.

Think of Peter stepping out of the boat. He had to step outside the comfort of the boat just based on what Jesus said and start walking on water. He hoped he could do it, but he had never seen it before. Matthew 14:29
When the Israelites were crossing the Jordan, the priests had to enter the water before it parted. Joshua 3

My faith is stretched at the moment. We are looking for a new pastor and working to get our building project off the ground. Both are challenging. In the natural we are not seeing things happen. We are out in the deep as it were, and it is hard to see the way ahead. I have decided that I do not like faith stretching times. There is a sense of being out of control, and my anxiety levels have been rising. Faith is a challenging business.

2. Faith focusses on a person.

Too many Christians' faith is in a set of doctrines. I believe in these 10 doctrine points. Don't you dare challenge them or else I will lose my faith. Too many Christians lose faith when a prophecy does not come about or when God does not answer a prayer they way they wanted or the church does not deliver what they expected. However, our faith as Christians is in a person. Jesus Christ. We cannot see Jesus we cannot prove he exists. However, our faith rests in the fact we believe he is God, that he is good, and that he loves us and wants the best for us

We see this with the one person who comes back. Nine of them just wanted the gift. One of them wanted the giver. Nine of them had faith in an outcome. However, one of them had faith in a person Jesus Christ. Never base your faith on anything other than the person of Jesus Christ. Then you will never be disappointed. Jesus will never leave you.

3. Faith brings wholeness.

Nine of the men were healed of leprosy. Great. However, being physically healed does not make us whole. We have emotional and spiritual parts of our lives

When Jesus asked you faith has made you well he is saying something more. He is saying the leper has been saved. He has come into relationship with Jesus. His sins have been forgiven. He is part of the family of God. Sometimes we focus too much on physical wholeness and neglect other areas. God wants to bring healing to us spiritual and emotionally. We all carry baggage from our past that God wants to heal.

I carry wounds from my childhood. I am prone to be hard on myself. Thoughts of failure lurk beneath the surface and I have to keep reminding myself that I am a loved child of God. I have to work to keep depression at bay. Am I whole? No. Has God brought healing? Yes. In addition, I know that one day I will be whole and healed in every way when I am with the Lord. However, I do know we can never truly be well until we bring our lives into alignment with God.



The second lesson here is about thankfulness and gratitude.

Nine people wanted the gift, but not the giver. In addition, if we are honest, this is often typical of our relationship with God. We are all over God when we want something, but when we do not and things are going well, we just do our own thing.

Jesus healed many people thousands and yet it seems there were only around 500 to begin the early church. He knew that many of the crowds were just seeking him for what they could get. They did not want relationship. They did not want to pay the cost of discipleship. How much is our relationship with God characterized by gratitude for what God has done for us. How much do we just take God for granted? How often do we pray and then if God does answer we do not thank him, we just ignore God until another pressing need comes along.

There are a lot of consumer Christians around today.

Is thankfulness a core spiritual discipline in your life? Taking the time to stop and thank God, for what he has done and is doing and will do is essential.

The Psalmist says enter his courts with thanks giving. Come into his presence as we give thanks. It is the fundamental attitude of how we approach God

Thankfulness is a way of expressing humility. It is a practical way of acknowledging God's sovereignty. It is a way of acknowledging that everything we have is in God's hands.

In self-help circles, thankfulness is encouraged to help with depression and anxiety. Studies have shown that it actually does not work if you have serious depression and anxiety. Telling a depressed person to be more thankful is of little value.

However, people with good mental health are generally thankful people. It is just not a magic tool to get there. In addition, I am not sure thankfulness works if we have no one to be thankful too. I think gratitude really has to be expressed to someone, not just expressed to the general universe.

If we don't fully grasp how much we have been forgiven or how much we have in God, then we are not going to be grateful. I think this is a particular challenge if we have grown up in the church. We have not known anything else.

The leper knew what he had been and what he was now. He knew he had done nothing to deserve being healed. He had not earned it. Asked and received it. Nothing of his own doing.

If we have grown up in the church, we have always known God's grace, love. It is easy to gain an attitude of

entitlement. Nothing puts those outside the church off more than a holier than thou attitude that somehow we are better than others are.

Take a minute to reflect on these two lessons. Do you need to take a step of faith this morning? Do you need to put your faith into an action step?

What are you basing your faith on? A prophesy, a set of doctrines that you believe are correct, an expected outcome of prayer, an experience? Faith is based on the person of Jesus Christ. And he is good. In addition, all-powerful. In addition, will never leave you.

Are there areas of your life where you have not let Jesus into yet, where you need healing? Maybe you have been looking for that healing in other places. Invite Jesus into areas of wounding that you have buried. There is a Place for medication, place for counselling, but actually, you will not find true healing until you let God into those places.

Gratitude, thankfulness: What discipline do you have in place to help make thankfulness a core part of your life? Are you taking God for granted? Are you more interested in what you can get from God than God himself? How much of your prayer life is around asking for stuff, rather than just being with God? How much time do you spend just slowing down, being aware of his presence with no other agenda.

What is your attitude to those who are outside the church, maybe with major issues in their lives? If there are judgmental attitudes in your life, then it will come out, and it suggests you have a sense of entitlement that you need to confess. Let God judge people; that is not our role. Ours is to be givers of grace. Yet somehow, that is not what we are known for.

Is there a person you need to take the time to thank today. That has been generous to you and you have just gone off like the other 9 lepers.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. When have you had to take a step of faith in your life? How did it feel?
2. When have you placed your faith in something other than Jesus? What was the result?
3. What areas of your life other than physical have you come to realize you need healing in? How can you allow Jesus into these areas?
4. What steps have you or could you take to make gratitude a key spiritual practice?
5. If you have grown up in Christian circles, with no powerful before/after story, how do we become more aware of just how much we owe God?
6. Is there anyone you should thank today?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

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