

## **Faith, Grace and Gratitude** **Luke 17:11-19**

If you're a visitor here, we are working our way through Luke's gospel, and today we're in chapter 17. Now, we've called the whole series, Meet Jesus. And we've called it that for a reason. I think it would be true to say that for many of us – whether or not we've grown up with a church background – we have these preconceived ideas about Jesus and often those bear very little resemblance to the truth. And Luke wrote this Gospel that we might meet and encounter Jesus as He really is.

And this morning we're going to look at a story of ten men who did just that – who came face to face with Jesus, and whose lives were transformed as a result. And as you're going to see it is a fascinating story of faith and grace and gratitude and salvation on the one hand and indifference and ingratitude on the other.

### **Read Luke 17:11-19**

Now if you've been tracking with us you'll know, as Luke reminds us in v11, that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. But Luke doesn't tell us that just so we know Jesus' travel itinerary. Having said He's heading to Jerusalem, Luke goes on to say that Jesus was, 'passing along between Samaria and Galilee.' Which is interesting because the border country between those two areas ran from east to west, and not north to south. And Jerusalem was in the south, and to the north of Jerusalem was Samaria and to the north of Samaria was Galilee. So if Jesus was walking in the border country He was walking east to west, not north to south. So this isn't some straight line, linear journey from Galilee to Jerusalem that Jesus is on. Luke isn't telling us Jesus is heading to Jerusalem so we can stick pins in a map; this is about Jesus' relentless progression to all that awaits Him in the capitol. He's heading to Jerusalem in the sense of making His way to the cross. You see, the journey, the miracles, the teaching, the life, the example of Jesus, they're all crucial, but ultimately it is what happens when He gets to Jerusalem: His death, His resurrection that define who Jesus is. It's His destiny that is coming ever nearer.

But as he describes this journey from chapter 9 onwards, Luke gives most of his attention to Jesus' teaching, rather than His miracles. Between the start of this journey narrative in chapter 9 and Jesus' trial and execution towards the end of the gospel, only 5 miracles get a mention, and this one is the 4<sup>th</sup>. And given the scarcity of Luke's reporting these miracles, you've got to ask with each one, how come this one made the cut? Why does this one get included when presumably so many others didn't, and why is Luke telling us about it now, at this point?

Well, lying just below the surface of the story of ten men getting healed is a deeper story and it's that story that is the real reason Luke includes it. And it's in that deeper story that, if you look closely enough, you might just find yourself.

### **Trust and Obey**

As Jesus enters a village Luke tells us that, v12, 'he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance.' Now you don't have to read the gospels for long before you encounter this terrible disease of leprosy. And it was terrible, not just because of its effects on the human body as it eats away at the sufferer's face, and fingers

and feet and nerves, leaving its victims horribly disfigured. It was terrible also because of the measures taken by the community to try and stop it spreading like contagion. Terrible because, once diagnosed, it meant the affected person was effectively put into isolation and quarantine; excluded from society, sent away from their family; forced to live alienated from others, outside the camp, outside the town. And so not only were its victims physically disfigured, with all the psychological wounds that would produce, they also faced the inner trauma of separation and isolation from their loved ones, and, on top of it all, was the fact that many would have viewed them as personally cursed by God. It is difficult to express in words what a diagnosis of leprosy meant for an individual. It must have been like a living death sentence.

And these ten lepers have banded together. They've formed a little community. And it seems as if nine of them were Jews and one was a Samaritan. Now, that may not seem much to you, but remember that Jews hated Samaritans. They loathed them as idolatrous half-breeds. And the feeling was mutual. And the fact that years of racial, religious, political, visceral hatred could be overcome in this little community of nine Jews and one Samaritan speaks volumes about what they faced in their common enemy of leprosy. And here they were, banded together by what they faced together. It's the community of the unclean, of the sick, of the defiled, of the hurting, of the ostracized, of the scarred, of the alienated.

Now whatever you face in life, none of us here face the kind of physical or social disease they faced. In fact, the very fact that you are here living in Switzerland, tells you that you are at exactly the opposite end of the social spectrum to these ten men. Yet just as He had for these men, Jesus has come to rescue us and redeem us from that kind of community – the community of the hurting and the hopeless and the alienated and bring us into a new community, the community of the ransomed, the community of the redeemed, the community of His people.

But notice how that happens here, how Jesus effects change in their lives: These men put themselves in Jesus' way. Luke tells us, they stood at a distance, because they were lepers, and they knew they couldn't come near, and they 'lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us"' (v13).

Now what do you think are they after? What do they want Jesus to do for them? It's not rocket science is it! They ask for mercy, they ask Jesus to show them compassion. But they're after more than a shoulder to cry on – they want Him to heal them, they want Him to turn their situation around, they want Him to transform their lives for good just as leprosy had transformed it for ill. And they're coming to Jesus because they know that He has the power to change. That's why they call Him, 'Master.'

Let me ask you this morning, where do you go for that power? When you know you need help, like they knew they needed help; when you know things aren't right in your life, when you know things need to change? Where do you go when you're struggling, not necessarily with skin disease, but deeper dis-ease of the heart, with anger, or unforgiveness, or self-centredness? Last Saturday it was my

joy to preach at Paolo and Catherine's wedding, and I asked the congregation where on earth could Paolo and Catherine hope to find the strength and the help to live out their wedding vows and to let love flourish, not just for a few weeks or months but until death parts them. Where can any of us find the kind of help and power we need to live as we are called to live? Fortunately, they had as one of their readings Psalm 121: 'I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.'

You see, you can look inside yourself, or you can turn to the self-help gurus, or you can learn some pop psychology, but the real power, the power to help and to change that brings about real, lasting transformation, comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. And these ten men knew that. So, as JC Ryle says, 'they found words to express their feelings.' They put themselves in Jesus way and lifted up their voices and asked for mercy. And when you know your need, and when you know it's in Jesus that you'll find the help you need, and when you know He's the Master, you'll find the words or the groans to ask Him.

And if you're anything like me, then when your prayer life is cold or non-existent or your thoughts are all over the place when you're praying, that is so often because you don't feel that need, you don't feel it deep down, that unless Jesus does this for you, you're sunk. Instead, too often we are far too easily satisfied with other stuff, or with the status quo. And these men could never accept the status quo.

And in response, Jesus says, v14, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." He doesn't pray with them, doesn't lay hands on them, doesn't anoint them with oil, He doesn't do anything you might expect Him to do – He just commands them to go to the priests who were like the first century equivalents of health inspectors. It was the priests' responsibility to declare whether or not someone had been healed.

And the men did it. Now, they could have stayed and argued with Jesus, they could have said, "Come on Jesus, you can't send us there without any evidence we've been healed, we'll just be rejected all over again." But they don't argue, they take Jesus at His word, they obey His instruction and it was as they turned and went, Luke tells us, that they were cleansed. It was as they trusted and obeyed Jesus that they were healed, that things came right in their lives. It wasn't that their faith was massive, it wasn't that they had to whip it up in a frenzy, it was simply taking Jesus as His word and doing what He told them to do. As we saw last week in v6, Jesus says, you just need faith like a grain of mustard seed.

But that's not always the case. Here Jesus asks these men to demonstrate faith, but He doesn't always do that. One of Jesus' most spectacular healings was of the man at the pool of Bethesda. And that man demonstrated zero faith. It's not even obvious that he wanted to be healed. And when Jesus raised the dead there was no way they could demonstrate faith, the dead were in no state to demonstrate anything! Because ultimately, whatever transformation God brings about in our lives – whether He calls us to exercise faith or not – it is all by His grace.

But there will be times in your life, you might even be facing one now, when God calls you to obey Him in some area, and follow through on what He is calling you to do, and you can see all the reasons why you shouldn't do it, but His voice and His word is insistent, and it's the call to trust Him and obey Him. He knows what He's doing. You see, ultimately faith is not based on sight, it's not based on what you can see. If these men had gone by sight they would have stayed rooted to the spot and never turned and gone and never known what it was to be healed. They would have stayed looking at their diseased skin. But faith isn't about what you can see, it's about the One your trusting. That's why the apostle Paul, in a great definition of faith, says of Abraham that he was 'fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised' (Rom 4:21). That's faith. Abraham didn't look at his body or Sarah's body good as dead as they were, he looked to God and believed that if God said He would give him a son, he would.

So when you face a situation and you know what He's calling you to do and you're questioning it: Trust and Obey.

Well, all ten did that, and all ten got healed. And to have healed just one would have been a miracle, but for Jesus to heal ten by simply sending them away is staggering and a wonderful display of the mercy and compassion and power of Jesus. But though all ten got healed, only one came back.

### **Grace and Gratitude**

It is possible, and if you're honest you'll know this from your own life, it is possible to receive God's gifts and be ungrateful. It is possible to have Jesus intervene powerfully in your life, and answer your prayer, or rescue your marriage, or transform your life, or heal your body or demonstrate His grace to you in whatever way, and yet not translate that into worship and thankfulness.

Now sure the nine men would have been glad. You bet they were overjoyed to be cleansed, to be able to come back into society, to be reunited with their families. And having been declared clean by the priests they would have gone to the temple and made their sacrifices and done the religious bit, done what was required of them. But it's interesting, isn't it, that those nine don't turn back to Jesus. After all, they now had what they wanted – healthy bodies – and it didn't go any deeper. They were so taken up by the joy of what they had been given, that they didn't give a thought to its source. They didn't see beyond the 'now', they didn't stop to ask, 'what does this say about Jesus, and what does it say about me in relationship with Him?'

Only one out of the ten turns back to Jesus. Just one man went against the flow. Instead of being carried along by the moment and by the crowd just one of them turns back. And he, Luke says really bluntly in v16, 'was a Samaritan.' The one man in the group you wouldn't expect to turn back and throw himself at the feet of this Jewish rabbi, is the very one who comes back.

And he comes back, Luke tells us in v15, 'praising God with a loud voice.' No standing with hands in pockets, half-hearted and distracted, his joy and his praise is overflowing. And he throws himself on his face at Jesus' feet thanking

Him. He doesn't wait until he's certified clean, he doesn't wait for the 'right moment' to be allowed back in – now's the moment, now's the time to express to God everything that's on his heart. He's been cleansed, he's been healed, he's been restored, he's going to be able to embrace his wife and kiss his children. And he knows who's done it all for Him: Jesus.

Now, I could take this passage and stand here and say to you, church, you've got to make sure you don't just enjoy the gift but neglect the giver. You've got to take less and give more. And sometimes you might even hear someone say in a church this would be a so much more happening place if people came to give rather than to receive. But you know, guilt and duty are zero motivators to thankful worship.

I could say to you, with a wagging finger, 'it's possible to be happy with the gift and neglect the giver', and you just feel guilty about that. But guilt is no motivator, it's no incentive to worship. Imagine if I were to buy a bunch of flowers for Su and take her out for a nice meal, and over dinner she asked, 'this is so lovely that you've done this for me. What made you go to all this trouble?' And I replied 'guilt,' she wouldn't be too impressed. Or if I said 'duty' – I'm taking you out because it's my duty, she wouldn't be too impressed either. No don't get me wrong – duty is a good thing, it's a holy thing. But neither guilt nor duty are motivators for heart-and-hand-and-mind-engaged worship.

This Samaritan falls in worship at Jesus feet because he knows what Jesus has done for him. He comes back praising God and thanking Jesus, because he knows, he understands all that Jesus has done for him. It's not guilt that motivates his worship, it's grace. It's not duty; it's the mercy of Jesus poured into his life. And when you and I understand all that Jesus has done for us, in paying the ultimate price for our sins, in conquering death and setting us free and giving us new life through His resurrection, when the depth of that dawns on us, we'll worship. It is as we daily feel our debt to grace, that we can't give Him anything, but that He has given us everything, that worship and praise will well up out of grateful, thankful hearts.

But beyond the trusting and obeying and the grace and the gratitude lies a deeper story.

### **A deeper healing**

The nine go off and it seems likely that Jesus never sees them again. It's only the one man who realizes that what has happened to him deserves more: that Jesus' transforming power in his life deserves a personal, heart-level response to Jesus. You see, the nine just see Jesus as a healer, as a teacher, as a rabbi. And the last we see of them is as they make their way to the priests, and to the temple, to a dutiful, but ultimately empty religion.

The one turns back because something dawns on him as to what this power says about Jesus. He sees what the nine don't see. They are going to the priests and the temple thinking that is where they will find God. The one falls at Jesus feet and worships Him because he knows he has encountered God.

And with this ex-leper, on his face before him, Jesus says to him, v19, 'Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.' Except that isn't what the text says – as your footnote will tell you. The verb Jesus uses there is the verb *sozo*. Which can mean *to be healed*, but more commonly means, *to be saved*. So literally, Jesus says to this one man, 'rise and go, your faith has saved you.' You see, in the end, this story is more than about physical healing; all ten of them got physically healed, but it's only to the one who turns back and comes to Jesus that Jesus says, 'your faith has saved you.' Everyone got their skin healed. This man gets his soul healed. Because salvation is not just about our physical wellbeing – it's about a wellness of soul.

And it's this one man who demonstrates a faith that sees Jesus for who He is, and turns back to Him; It's this one man who through faith humbles himself before Jesus and bows down in worship, who gets saved. Because this is a different kind of faith to the other nine. It's saving faith that means his soul as well as his body is cleansed and healed.

And the question for each one of us is: are you with the nine or the one?

Because that's the reason Luke includes this story here. As Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem people's opinions are polarizing about Him. And as He travels His teaching is broadly aimed at two groups of people: his disciples and the Pharisees, the religious types. Both get to hear Jesus, both get to spend time with Jesus, both have a front row seat to witness the miracles of Jesus. But some will turn away and, like the nine, head back to their religion. And through this story, Jesus and Luke are saying to those who listen, are you with the nine who turn away or with the one who turns around and comes to Jesus?

And in v18 Jesus asks a rhetorical question: 'was no-one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' And that's an interesting choice of words on Jesus' part. It's the only time that specific word for *foreigner* is used in the Bible. But it was used somewhere else, in Jerusalem, in the temple, on the sign that warned foreigners, on pain of death, that they were not allowed to enter. The nine head off to an empty temple that this Samaritan, this foreigner was not allowed to enter. But it's him, a foreigner, an outcast, who once was cut off and alienated both from God and His people who gets to worship at Jesus' feet. Because in Jesus, the grace of God is available to all. You just have to believe, and turn and come.