

Dec 5<sup>th</sup> 2010: Because He Saved Me. The thankful leper: Luke 17:11-19

Leprosy was one of the worst diseases doing the rounds when Jesus walked this earth. Once you had it you were doomed to a slow and painful destruction of your life. It stole from its victims everything that made life worth living and left in its place complete hopelessness.

It stole a person's identity. Once the disease had been recognized in them they became outcasts. Separated from family, friends, and healthy society, they were banished from everything that gave their life meaning. They were no longer differentiated from others by their name, occupation, gender or position in their town or village, but by the one title that they hated and dreaded. LEPER!

It stole their usefulness. The disease ate away at the extremities of their flesh and so destroyed their nerve system that even a small task became extremely difficult to complete. They were seen as contagious and consequently were kept at a distance, deliberately shunned as dead men walking. Of no value to society, just beggars to be avoided.

It stole their connection with God. They could not worship in the Temple and the rules for attending a synagogue were so restrictive that in practice it could never happen. The overwhelming belief was that leprosy was a curse of God because of their sin and so they lost the sympathy vote too. The only good thing about the disease, if indeed you could call it good, was that it broke down the barriers of race, class, circumstances. All lepers, be they past enemies or friends, were lumped together as one because of their disease.

So it was that amongst the group of ten lepers that met Jesus as he was about to enter a village that they were banned from, included at least one Samaritan. At least one person that the others would normally have avoided any contact with. But such differences were no longer important. They were all now in the same terrible and hopeless state. And when they saw and recognized Jesus, they kept their distance, for that was the law, and shouted out: "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

They don't ask for healing but for pity. They use the technical term that every beggar knew so well that translates into—have compassion; have mercy. "Look at our desperate state and give us whatever you can to help us through yet another sad and meaningless day." And when Jesus saw them.

Saw their filthy rags; their broken lives; their deformed and malnourished bodies he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." This command that means so little to us meant so much to them. For the only reason a leper would be sent to see a priest was to receive the confirmation that their leprosy was gone.

The incredible fact is, that the ten of them were moved to accept Jesus' answer, and as a group turned from Him to do just that. It shows the power that Jesus had. He spoke and they obeyed. And the Scripture says in v 14

***"And as they went, they were cleansed."***

The Greek tense is very clear here. It literally says that in their going they were immediately cleansed. Their response to Jesus words instantly brought about a cleansing from this terrible disease. And it was a cleansing they could see in each other. That's what makes their lack of thankfulness so hard to understand. This was the greatest physical gift they could ever have received, yet they are not moved to instantly praise God. It is as though they are so focused on what this means for them in practical and physical terms that they miss the full mystery of what God has just done.

It is this that so disappoints Jesus, and we must not miss seeing the depth of His disappointment here. In v17-18 we read:-

***Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? <sup>18</sup> Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"***

He is not disappointed about them not thanking Him, but upset because they did not acknowledge the amazing fact that God was at work through Him. They did not put Praise to God first above everything else. He had expected them to, because they were obviously Jews. They had been taught that when God manifested His power in such an obvious way, they should come before Him in awe and thanksgiving. For God's great acts were not just to make life easier for His people, but to display His glory which would then lead His people to give their lives completely over to Him.

For example when God parted the Red Sea it was not just to save His people from the fury of the Egyptians. It was also to proclaim His power and Glory to them in such a way that they would from then on relate to Him in awe, and surrender, and thanksgiving.

These Jewish lepers, for reasons unknown to us, saw their healing no doubt, as wonderful but not as an major expression of Almighty God at work in their midst.

9 of these 10 lepers did not see the awesome power of Almighty God hovering over that place. They did not stop with fear and reverence in their hearts and think to themselves, the glory of Almighty God is here. It has touched and transformed my life and I dare not move from this spot until I have bowed before such Glory in praise and adoration.

But one did. A foreigner, who saw beyond his physical healing to the power of the One who could bring that healing to pass. 17:15 tells us that:-

***One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. <sup>16</sup> He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.***

He was full on in his praises to God—it was with a loud voice. He was overwhelmed with his own humanity as he stood in the presence of the One through whom the power of God had worked, and He threw himself at Jesus' feet in utter submission and surrender. And from his heart he expressed his thankfulness.

And Jesus gave this man something that I don't believe the others received. For he said to him in v19

***"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."***

The words 'made you well' are better translated 'saved you', for from the Greek word used here comes the English word 'salvation'. Later on in Luke 19:9 Jesus use the same root word when He says about Zacchaeus:-

***"Today salvation has come to this house"***

What this man received in addition to his physical healing was eternal salvation. He responded personally to the working of Almighty God in his life by faith, and was given in return eternal life.

It is this that leads me to believe that if we were to ask this man why he is a follower of Jesus, he wouldn't necessarily say, 'Because He healed me from leprosy'. That was a wonderful thing for him and the other 9 that would have definitely changed their lives for the better, but for this man it was secondary to something that changed his life for eternity. That's why I think

he would turn to us and say, "I am a follower of Jesus, because He saved me".

In the end this story is not really about being grateful or ungrateful, but about really seeing the wonder of the God who intervenes in our world....intervenes in our lives, and in awe falling at our feet before Him in Praise of His glory.

In a sense it is that which connects this story with the Christmas season. Many will use Christmas as a time to remember that Jesus was born in a stable at Bethlehem and in some small way they may even express thanks for that. But by comparison only a few will truly realize the awesome act we celebrate. That God became man and dwelt amongst us for our sake. That in the Christ child we behold the Word, who is Himself God, become flesh, and we see in him the glory of the only begotten of the Father.

But how do we get that truth across to others?

By coming to Christ at Christmas with a worship that is as obvious and as real as the worship of the Samaritan was. Worship that takes our time and our commitment and is seen as our priority. Worship that delights the heart of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, because it is a fitting response to the gift that gives us eternal salvation. Worship that is the giving of our lives to Him for Him to use—our living sacrifice—holy and acceptable to God.

Romans 12:1-2

***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.***

