

Luke: Exploiters of Jesus
Sermon 3-31-2019
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Message:

(Play video at <http://www1.cbn.com/stage-iv-cancer-healed>) “How could this be? God, I’ve served you all my life. I don’t understand. Why?” How many of us have asked these kinds of questions of God when we’ve gone through hard times? In one sense, it’s human to ask these sorts of questions when we’re going through hard times. We want to understand why we’re experiencing the hard times. At the same time, this testimony builds on our previous passage of the Prodigal Son. With Shirley’s initial reaction, who does she sound like? The younger son? The elder son? If you remember, the elder son said in so many words, “Why Father?” Why did you give the fatted calf to my underserving brother and not to me? I’ve served you all my life. When do I get rewarded?” This isn’t the kind of relationship God wants with his children, with Shirley. And it’s through this experience that Shirley rediscovers intimacy with the Father. Life WITH God. “I never found one place in the scriptures where someone came to Jesus for healing that they were not healed. I began to see that faith was not just believing that God was able but it was believing that He will.” While I don’t wish these kinds of experiences on anyone nor do I believe that God causes them, I do believe God uses these opportunities to build relationship and intimacy with His children. God used this opportunity with Shirley to build relationship with her and her husband. “I’ve been healed today because I believed His word and I took it, and it had to become part of every cell of my being...” Jesus had grace upon Shirley.

It's this same grace that calls forth to us in our passage today. ¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!'" These lepers know that Jesus has the gift of healing and they can be healed. And so Jesus says to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." Why does Jesus say this? Well...lepers were outcasted from the everyday society because leprosy was believed to be contagious and incurable. So the only way they knew how to take care of it was to separate the leprous people from the healthy people. This was also viewed as ceremonially unclean. Meaning, they couldn't sacrifice for sins or worship God if they were unclean. The disease distanced the lepers from God in their understanding. So to go to the priests was to confirm that they are healed and that they will not spread the leprosy to anyone else in their household or wherever they go. Now, they can return to normal life and reunite with God by sacrificing, by worshipping at the temple and synagogues.

If you remember back to 2 Kings 5, Naaman, a well-accomplished military commander for the Assyrian Empire had leprosy as well. He knew that if he didn't get help, no matter his status, that he would be outcasted from the Assyrian King. So his Israelite servant, told him about Elisha. The Assyrian King agreed to send him to Elisha for healing before officially out-casting him. Upon seeing Elisha, Elisha never comes out of his house, he just tells a servant to tell Naaman to wash in the Jordan 7-times. Naaman is outraged by this because Elisha didn't actually touch him or honor his status by meeting Naaman face-to-face. But his servants convinced Naaman to go to the Jordan anyway and wash in the Jordan. The text tells us, ¹⁴"So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

¹⁵Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel...'" Sound familiar? Our passage has echoes of the Elisha and Naaman story. Elisha can confirm that Naaman is now healed of his leprosy and sent him back to his king. Back to normal life.

But here's the twist to our passage in Luke. ¹⁵"Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan." Why is this so significant? For a number of reasons. One, the most shocking part for the ancient world reader of this story is that this person is a Samaritan. Samaritans were thought of as "less-than" in Israel at this time. Who are the Samaritans? The region of Samaria is part of the diaspora Jews. What does that mean? When the Israelites were exiled from Jerusalem by the Babylonians, they began living in

different places with “foreigners.” The Israelites were spread-out across the land. Since the temple was destroyed at that time, they had to find different ways of worshipping God because they didn’t have the temple. This is a time period where Synagogues and such were developed. For the Samaritans, they aren’t purists. Meaning, they don’t believe in the centrality of worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, but they still believe in God and have a different temple. They may have also intermingled with foreigners through marriage and creating families. So they’re Jewish/Israelite of a sort. One example of this is when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well in the Gospel of John. She claims that they shouldn’t be talking because Jesus worships at the temple in Jerusalem and she worships at a different temple. So she claims that they are fundamentally different and shouldn’t interact. Of course, Jesus blows that notion up in his interaction with her. So if you’re a Israelite purist reading this passage, it would be shocking to hear that it wasn’t a purist who thanked Jesus, but it was a Samaritan. Another significant note is that he disobeyed Jesus’ instruction. Jesus told them to “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” This Samaritan turned back, praised God and thanked Jesus. The last significant piece is that the Samaritan thanked him and no one else thanked him. Not the purists. Not those who pride themselves on following commands and being obedient. What this displays is the character of the Samaritan compared to the others. Jesus notes as much, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Let’s take a break from our passage for a second and look at our previous passage. ⁷“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’” What’s Jesus saying in this passage to the disciples? The disciples are looking for accolades for what they’ve done and how they’ve obeyed Jesus. For doing what was asked of them. The key question Jesus asks there is, “Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded?” No. The point being that we cannot expect God to reward us for simply obeying His commands. If we refer back to our video, what does Shirley say, “‘How could this be? God, I’ve served you all my life. I don’t understand. Why?’” She expects to be rewarded for her obedience by never having to face any kind of suffering in this world. She should be free of suffering if she’s obeyed Him. Again, Jesus never promises us this. Biblical Scholar, Alan Culpepper says this, “God owes us

nothing for living good, Christian lives. God's favor and blessing are matters of grace—they cannot be earned. Therefore, when we assume that we can deal with God on the basis of what God owes us, we have made a basic mistake. We have rejected grace as the basis of our relationship to God and based that relationship on our own worth and merit. Grace, by definition, is a free gift." The Samaritan seems to understand, unlike the rest, that what Jesus gave them was an act of grace. Not something they earned or were commanded to do. Culpepper puts it this way, "Discipleship requires doing one's duty, but because of God's mercy, God's servants can never repay the grace they have experienced."

The Samaritan in our passage is an example of a "Life WITH God." Gratitude can't be coached. TRUE gratitude can't be coached. Many of us have probably raised our children to "thank" someone after they do something for them. We may say to our little child, "Did you thank them?" To invoke that response is a learned and trained behavior. In other words, they can go through the right motions, but what you can't force your child to do is to be truly grateful. In the same way, we can't force someone to have a relationship with another. It's something that they have to experience and develop on their own. They may be able to mimic what a relationship looks like, but to have a relationship is something that one has to authentically experience. If you look back over our passage, Jesus could have told the 10 lepers to "thank" him after being healed. I'm sure if the other 9 heard of what the Samaritan did, they probably felt a little guilty thinking, "I probably should have thanked Jesus." They could go back later and "thank" Jesus, but it will feel disingenuous because they're doing this out of guilt rather than genuine gratefulness. I don't know about you, but I can tell when someone compliments me or thanks me out of duty or politeness versus a genuine compliment or "thank you." There's a sharp contrast. And I'm sure you can tell the difference too. What is reflected in our passage is not an action of duty, but an action that is a reflection of character and authentic thankfulness. The Samaritan recognizes the relationship and the true grace that he's been given. He didn't earn it. It wasn't commanded of him. In fact, he disobeyed Jesus' command in order to thank Him. This reflects a love relationship. What's better than obedience? A love for God.

The other 9 were exploiters of Jesus. They wanted his blessings, but they didn't want a relationship. They didn't truly understand the gift of grace that was given to them. How many of us pray and accept God's blessings and then run away? We like what God does FOR us, but we don't have a relationship WITH Him? In his book, *God is the Gospel*, John Piper poses this question: "The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the

natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?” Sadly, the other nine lepers from this story would answer “Yes.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they were about to be thrown into the fire told the king that the Lord would save them but even if he didn’t they would still serve him as it’s found in the book of Daniel. Their relationship wasn’t built on what God could do for them but on the love they had for Him. The message today is NOT to tell you to add to your prayer to-do list “thank God.” I can tell you to do that, but it will be disingenuous. It won’t be based on love. And therefore, not a relationship WITH God. What I hope is revealed to you today is what kind of relationship you have WITH God. If Jesus never answered another prayer the way you wanted Him to, would you continue to love Him? Your answer to that question should reveal a lot. Jesus loves you so immensely that He doesn’t just want to be the dispenser of gifts, miracles and blessings, but He wants His relationship with you to be blessing enough or to be the grandest blessing of all. If you spend time WITH Jesus, I can promise you, He will be the grandest blessing you have ever experienced. Amen.