

AM Luke 17:11-19 "Where are the other nine?"

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[0 : 0 0] passages from Luke's Gospel this morning. Luke chapter 4 verses 14 to 30 and then a short passage from Luke 17. So let's begin with Luke chapter 4 at verse 14. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to the valley. This is after the time of temptation in the wilderness. And a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

And he said to them, Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, Physician, heal yourself. What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in his hometown as well.

And he said, Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth I tell you that there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land. And Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built.

So that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away. And if we turn to Luke 17 at verse 11. Luke 17 at verse 11.

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.

[3 : 2 6] And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. When he saw them, he said to them, go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. And he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, were not ten cleansed?

Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner? And he said to him, rise and go on your way. Your faith has made you well.

May God bless this reading of his word. It was good to have a specific text. And the text for today would be Luke 17, 17. So not hard to remember.

Were not ten healed? Where are the nine? Well, where are the other nine? What fearful questions fall from the lips of Christ Jesus?

Are we the one? Or are we one of the nine? Are we posted missing when it comes to thankfulness of heart?

[5 : 17] Do we take the myriad of God's daily blessings to us all for granted? When it comes to our salvation, do we take that for granted too?

Do we thank our Saviour? Do we thank our Father in Heaven for so loving the world? Or are we posted missing there too?

Or through familiarity perhaps? Or worldly cares and pressures? Has our love and our thanks cooled to lukewarmness?

From when we first met with Christ and opened the door to our hearts as he knocked. There's a real challenge for us today in this passage.

When Jesus asks, where are the other nine? Let's try and get into the background to today's passages of Scripture. So that we can fully understand what our Lord is asking us.

[6 : 25] Because unless we try to ignore the Spirit stirring in our hearts, our Master's question deserves an answer. Don't you think? What we understand as leprosy nowadays may well be a little different from what is mentioned in the New Testament and was being thought about in the Old Testament in Exodus and Leviticus, particularly Leviticus 13 and 14.

It talks there about skin rashes, those rashes spreading and the priest pronouncing the individual concerned unclean. Chillingly, it says, it is a defiling skin disease.

Now, those rules and regulations introduced by the Mosaic Law to prevent the spread of skin diseases actually deserve an accolade because they have to be recognised as basic and wonderfully effective public health measures for controlling the spread of contagious diseases, skin diseases.

And, you know, in the context of maybe two and a half million people in one camp at the Red Sea and then in the wilderness, contagious skin disease would spread like wildfire.

And we are stirred to our core, are we not, when we think of the possibility of spread of other diseases in the compacted refugee camps of Gaza today.

[8 : 05] And this winter. But that fear was just as real in the mid-15th century BC. Leprosy then understood as meaning something which was ceremonially unclean.

It was applied to a variety of skin diseases and did include modern-day leprosy so that those whom Jesus healed may well have had precisely what we understand as leprosy.

But it could also have included non-contagious skin diseases such as psoriasis or dermatitis as well as infections, pustules and boils, impetigo and maybe staphylococcal, streptococcal infections, even fungal ones.

There speaks the medic. However, whatever the actual pathogen, whatever caused the disease process, the end result is the same.

There was superficial physical scarring and disability, but the disconnect and the pariah status of sufferers intensified the consequences of the condition far beyond the merely physical.

[9 : 26] Leviticus 13 and 45 says, Anyone with such a defiling skin disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, Unclean!

Unclean! As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean. They must live alone. They must live outside the camp. Leprosy sufferers were, and in some areas of the world, still are outcasts, untouchables, defiled, unclean.

They're still left outside the camp. And they're left there with their disease until they satisfy the rules for public health safety. This was all the more so in Jesus' time.

And the words counter-cultural and radical do not begin to describe the grace of our Lord when in Matthew 8, verses 2 and 3, he reached out his hand and he touched a man with leprosy kneeling before him and healed him.

Let me just read those verses to you. Matthew 8, 2 and 3. When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.

[10 : 48] A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.

I am willing, he said. Be clean. Immediately, he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, see that you don't tell anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded as a testimony to them.

Touch it and you'll catch it, was the horrified cry. But our Lord towered above the fear of contagion. He supplied supernatural healing for this man's leprosy.

And he demonstrated the willingness of his heart towards cleansing sinners in all sorts of ways. And he demonstrated his faithfulness to God, his Father's word, and his laws, adhering to what was laid down in the Torah for the healed sufferer to present a grain offering, a guilt offering, a wave offering, a sin offering through the good offices of the priest.

And for the priest to make atonement once healing had occurred. We read about that in Leviticus 14. But the Lord Jesus also demonstrated sound, practical, common sense.

[12 : 16] Because in that, in the testimony of this religious act of thankfulness before and with the priest, that would be providing the legally binding route, the ticket, if you like, for reintegration of the leper into society.

Of course, I have a special heart for sufferers from leprosy. Because when I was a medical student, many moons ago, I spent a month working in a leprosy hospital in Narsapur, in Andhra Pradesh in India, roughly halfway between Madras and Calcutta on the east coast, or Chennai and Calcutta, as they're now known.

And there was a long-held, incorrect belief that being in contact with lepers meant you would catch it. But in truth, the bacterium that causes leprosy, and it's a close relative of the one that causes tuberculosis, it really targeted those people who were in poor general health.

They were run down with poor nutrition and anemia. And fit and healthy people with a good diet would rarely be affected. In the hospital where I worked, and it was a memorable month when I was there, there were over 400 patients, all ostracised by their communities and families.

They were all living together. They were farming their own food. They were being cared for by several very dedicated nurses, as well as looking after each other.

[14 : 07] And they were also cared for by one very remarkable Christian doctor, Dr. Edward Short, who performed amazingly complex tendon transplant operations with the most basic of equipment.

The good that Mission Hospital did was incalculable, both medically and socially.

Of course, the last 40 years has seen great improvements in antibiotic treatment of leprosy, so that many patients are now cured, and the disease is less common than it was.

But in Jesus' time, at the time of Luke 17, ostracising skin disease was rife. And it was too in the days of Elijah and Elisha to which the Lord Jesus referred in Luke 4.

These two passages of Luke's Gospel that we read today are curiously leprosy bookends, if you like, one at the end and one at the start of Jesus' public ministry.

[15 : 24] Now, not long after, he was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, but then returned on the power of the Spirit to Galilee to begin his ministry, as it says in chapter 4, verse 14, Jesus went to Nazareth and he preached in the synagogue.

Wow, how the people loved him. They were wowed by everything about him until he confronted them with the consequences of sinful disobedience to God.

And disobedience to God's laws and prideful rejection of God but instead following some sort of nominal, self-serving religion was the endemic disease of the Jews.

And what led the touch paper was that Jesus pointed out to the crowd in Nazareth that there were many widows living in Israel in the time of Elijah, but rather than sending him to a Jewish widow, he was sent by God to one in Zidon in Lebanon, a Gentile widow in Zarephath.

And then there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's time and it was only one Assyrian, Naaman, who was healed by the prophet. So Jesus, at the outset of his ministry, he confronted his own Jewish people with the unacceptable reality of their own rejection of God generation after generation.

[17 : 04] But yet, God worked miracles of grace with non-Jews and a small remnant of God-fearing Jews.

Well, what a reception this truth received. Such was their outrage and their rejection of Jesus that they led him out to the brow of a hill called the Mount of Precipitation to throw him over the cliff, which was what their law dictated as a preliminary to stoning.

But, Jesus walked right through the middle of the hostile mob and went on his way. People do not like being shown their faults then or now.

here or throughout the world. But doesn't that verse 30 of chapter 4 of Luke's gospel thrill you? Jesus' time had not yet come.

And with divine authority, he walked unmolested right through the crowd who were specifically inciting each other to put him to death. But he, in his own way, was untouchable too.

[18 : 22] Until he willingly gave himself for us on the cross. Isaiah 53 tells us he poured out his own life unto death.

But for now, he had to be about his father's business. And so he walked through the middle of the crowd and went on his way. The other leprosy bookend took place three years later as Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for that final time as we read there in chapter 17.

And he and the disciples were following the pilgrim way along the border between Samaria and Galilee. The pilgrim way was where the pilgrims going up for the feasts would travel.

They would follow a designated route and then come round to the Jordan Valley, down the Jordan Valley to Jericho, then up the hill to Jerusalem. So they were following the pilgrim way and there we have got ten lepers and frankly the hearts of nine of the ten seem curiously similar to the Jews in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Presumably these nine were Jewish by race while the other completing the ten was a Samaritan, a foreigner.

[20 : 03] And that Samaritan is healed by faith in Jesus and thanks him for it. We've got a myriad of lessons to learn from Luke 17.

The first thing was these ten lepers stood at the distance as the law demanded. They weren't allowed to come near. They were way over at barbers.

But they didn't mutely accept their condition. They weren't idle. they called out in a loud voice it says. They made a right rumpus. Now leprosy in scripture time and again is used as a metaphor for sin in all our lives.

Something awful. Something terminal. Which cuts us off from God. Where we cannot help or cure ourselves.

Which involves great misery in our lives till Jesus comes along. And there is then the possibility of cure if we listen to his offer and obey his commands.

[21 : 17] In these circumstances we must make a right rumpus. We must cry out loudly to God for mercy and we must not settle for anything less than that his grace should intervene and that he would minister to us.

So these lepers firstly were not idle. They weren't resting on their laurels. They made a noise. And we should notice too that if as the gospel says one of the lepers was a Samaritan the implication is that the other nine were not.

But that they were Jews. And we know that it's said quite a few times in scripture that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Except when it comes to leprosy it would appear.

For that dreaded disease overrides all other distinguishing features. First and foremost they were all lepers. And isn't that the way with sin which does override all barriers of age, gender, race, nationality and religion.

As Paul says in Romans 3 22 there is no difference between Jew and Gentile for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[22 : 47] But thank God for the next verse where he says and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. The second point to notice is that these ten sufferers were acutely aware of their need of divine help.

How impaired is our vision and perspective so often so that we can see fault upon fault in others which remarkably we can't find in our own lives despite the presence of those very self-same faults in beam or plank size instead of the moat or speck size that's present in the lives of others.

Please note the use of the following words carefully to quote the ever so mortal bard. O would some power the gift he gives to see ourselves as others see us it would frame money a blunder free us and foolish notion.

I think that John exiled on Patmos puts it far better than that in Revelation 3 17 and 18 you say I'm rich I have acquired wealth and I do not need a thing but you do not realize that you are wretched pitiful poor blind and naked I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire says Jesus so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear so that you can cover your shameful nakedness and salve to put on your eyes so you can see and it's good to reflect also on the parable our Lord told of the Pharisee and the publican both of whom went up to the temple to pray the heart hardened hypocrite became harder while the penitent sinner humbled before his maker went home justified it's the same heat that hardens clay and softens wax as

Bishop Ryle put it so succinctly it's the same heat that hardens clay and softens wax and oh that we would have that sensitivity in our souls that awareness that work of grace in our hearts to see the depths of our own need and the riches of his grace thirdly these lepers cried earnestly for relief and that tells us a lot too about prayer it should be real meaningful heartfelt importunate humble pleading not a sure pretense to be seen by others it was for that that Jesus castigated the Pharisees in Matthew 23 now the prayers and cries of the diseased men in Luke 17 were not sophisticated pre-planned prolonged self-elevating ostentatious prayers so that all the onlookers might nod their approval from a distance of course these were cries from the heart from the place of destitution and abandonment from a place of desperation without hope in man but for the

[26 : 39] Samaritan at least with a recognition of the divine and hope in the mercy of this Jew Lord he says I wonder if it's our own experience that there are seasons of our lives when we are not subjected to great trials and testings and in those times our prayer life and our walk with God may remain faithful but perhaps lacking in fervor and lacking in intense needful simplicity and then the disaster happens the bereavement the job loss the illness the prognosis the relationship breakdown the separation from family by war the persecution the undermining of mental health and our spiritual senses and our need of God and our utter and complete dependency on him and his goodness are so sharpened that we cry out to God you see whatever of life's issues confronts us and whatever emotions or needs we recognize and feel God has a word for us and we find that there's a psalm which encapsulates our feelings and back there in psalm 130 we have described the lepers and the sinners plight out of the depths I cry to you Lord Lord hear my voice let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy that's the sinners cry if you Lord kept a record of sins Lord who could stand but with you there is forgiveness so that we can with reverence serve you

I wait for the Lord my whole being waits and in his word I put my hope it was Jesus word of command that brought the lepers hope and healing I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning more than watchmen wait for the morning Israel put your hope in the Lord for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption he himself will redeem Israel from all their sins and we can gain so much encouragement from another psalm psalm 119 where in verses 25 and 26 whether through illness or persecution or loss we find the psalmist laid low in the dust he says I am laid low in the dust preserve my life according to your word I gave an account of my ways and you answered me teach me your decrees now what is so encouraging is that when there's no help of man at all and you're as low as you can get physically and or spiritually you find in the dust that you are talking to

God and that he answers you you see no matter what distress you may experience our Lord has gone lower still into the depths with a unique fellow feeling for your infirmity whatever that infirmity is it is between you and him how gracious is our Lord another lesson is that healing for the lepers came as they followed the path of obedience though Jesus touched the leper in Matthew 8 here in Luke 17 he doesn't touch these 10 men but he gives them a command to follow just what was prescribed and the laws laid down in Leviticus 13 and 14 for people healed from skin disease he didn't touch them he just told them he told them what to do and it was in following the path of obedience in response to

Jesus and God's law that they were healed and isn't that so important you see do we really imagine that healing and forgiveness will come to us if we wittingly and willfully continue to disobey God's law and disregard God's word remember remember all the teachings we have about that faith without works is dead says James Jesus tells us in Matthew 20 one of the two sons asked by their father to go and work in the vineyard and one said he would go but he didn't and the other one said no way but actually he went actions speak louder than words and there's that passage in Ezekiel 33 where if a righteous person disobeys God their former righteousness will count for nothing while if a wicked person repents that person's former wickedness will not bring condemnation this is

[32 : 18] God's word but what a lesson we've got to learn from the reaction of the lepers to being healed nine of them had been crying for mercy received healing and no doubt went on their way rejoicing without a word of thanks to the healer all take no give they were healed purely because of the grace of our Lord Jesus the tenth leper the Samaritan one was different look what he did he didn't just say thanks he was going in the direction of the priests to show himself to them as Jesus had commanded but when he saw his skin condition was gone he stopped in his tracks he came back and he praised God and he did so in a voice and with a cry louder than the one that he used to plead for mercy in the first place the Greek text tells us that the voice pleading for mercy was loud the one thanking

God for receipt of the mercy was mega loud and not just words of thanks he threw himself at Jesus feet and thanked him when was the last time that literally or metaphorically we turned round and thanked God with our really loud voice for the forgiveness of our sins throwing ourselves at the feet of our saviour who gave his very life for us on the cross thanking him with an abundance of feeling that aspires to match the abundance of his giving of his life for us Jesus healing is very personal when he gave out his command not all lepers in Galilee or Samaria were healed it was only those who heard him and did what he said salvation and healing is not by proxy it was the ones who were looking at him and calling out to him who were healed but salvation is deeply personal a personal encounter for us with the risen

Lord Jesus I find it quite delightful that being confronted with Christ produces the same effect in all softened hearts John and Patmos we have Paul on the Damascus road we have got Isaiah in the year King Uzziah died we have Ezekiel by the Kibar river in Babylon and we have got an unnamed Samaritan leper beside the pilgrim highway from Samaria down the Jordan valley to Jericho and Jerusalem all falling in humble adoration in the dust at Jesus feet do we have that humble penitent heart seems to me that this man had nothing going for him and then he had everything going for him he could not have been in a worse situation he was ostracized outcast diseased poor lost untouchable and as if that wasn't enough he was a despised

Samaritan into the bargain and here was this Jewish rabbi coming by Lord have mercy but the Lord did have mercy doesn't scripture tell us of the special place in God's heart for the poor the foreigner the oppressed the widow the orphan and wasn't it Jesus calling not to preach to the self righteous but to call sinners to repentance to seek and to save the lost Jesus was and is the friend of publicans and sinners and he eats with them Jesus words to this thankful man are so special the nine you see had the most chilling question asked of them but where are the other nine where are they and where indeed but this Samaritan this utterly untouchable was healed because of his faith your faith has made you well and that faith is the gift of

God for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God so having seen and heard all this are we like unfaithful Israel who despite generations of hearing God's message and receiving his love reject him and satisfy ourselves with a form of religion are we like the nine who have received God's grace but haven't an ounce of thanks to give to the giver of that grace or are we like the Samaritan who recognises the depth of our sin and its awfulness and the great need and when Christ Jesus meets that need we throw ourselves before him in adoration and love and praise at his amazing love and grace let's finish with a word one word it's the word willing we know and rejoice in the great

[38 : 03] I am sayings of our Lord I am the bread of life the light of the world the door the good shepherd the resurrection and the life the way the truth and the life the vine but we limit those I am's to that holy number Jesus didn't many other times he said I am and he followed that with a further revelation about his character and that is what Jesus is teaching us in Matthew 8 Lord if you are willing you can make me clean said the leper I am willing said Jesus be clean are we like the Jews or like Jerusalem whom Jesus had longed to gather like a hen gathers our chicks under our wings but they were not willing or are we willing to come to Jesus just as we are in all our need of healing cleansing and renewal because his willingness to cleanse and heal is greater than our need so the deep deep love of Jesus he is willing amen let's pray together

He will work in him to, He will to in him becoming a aim where he is going so