

Grace and Gratitude

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Date: 06 April 2025

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[0 : 00] If someone wants to know what Christianity is all about, we could do no better than take them to this passage in Luke 17.! Christianity isn't about church buildings, cathedrals, rules, and regulations, philosophies, or systems of thought.

Christianity is about a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Christianity is a living and growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

In Luke 17 verses 11 through 19, ten men, and one in particular, standing on the outside of decent society, enter into a living relationship with Christ.

And that relationship changed them forever. They could never be the same after they met with Jesus. He made their lives worth living, and He gave them abundant life in Him.

Jesus brought them in from the cold. This short but very important passage is all about how we enter into and grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

[1 : 14] The Jesus who met these ten men that day is the same Jesus who by His Word and through the Holy Spirit invites us today, here, and now, to enter into a relationship with Him, to become Christians.

He's the same Jesus who hears our calls for help. The same Jesus who can change our lives forever.

We want to consider two features of this relationship today. First, grace. And secondly, gratitude. Jesus showed these ten men extraordinary grace.

And in return, only one showed Him extraordinary gratitude. If all we do today is to remember these two titles, grace and gratitude, it'll teach us all we need to know about how to enter into and to grow in our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The more of His grace we experience, the more gratitude we shall have toward Him. First of all then, grace.

[2 : 28] Grace. Grace. I've never seen a leper face-to-face. Only photographs. Thankfully, leprosy proper, Hansen's disease, is very rare in the Western world.

But in Jesus' day, along with many other skin conditions, it was called leprosy. And it was very common. Thus, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was met not just by one, but by ten lepers standing at a distance and crying out to Him, Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us.

He met ten men who were in great need. Ten men for whom life had become a walking death. It gave Jesus the perfect opportunity to demonstrate the supreme and sovereign grace of God to those who are suffering.

Now, in the Bible, grace is undeserved favor. It's the forgiveness of an enemy. It's the healing of a leper.

It's the welcoming of a stranger. It's a favor which is unexpected and undeserved. Grace is a gift. It's never earned. It's never given as a reward.

[3 : 42] It is a gift given freely at no cost to the recipient. So these lepers meet Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and provide Him with a perfect opportunity to show God's undeserved favor and to give them a gift which cost them nothing but Him everything.

The famous Christian C.S. Lewis once said that what marks Christianity out from every other religion in the world is the grace of God.

God's favor upon the undeserving, not given as a reward for good works, but as a free gift of His love. God's favor. If ever we see the grace of Christ in action, it's here, in this passage.

Let me suggest that out of the many examples of grace we could give, we focus on just two from this story. Grace in the conflict and grace to the outsider. Now, lest we think that this story has got nothing to do with us because none of us has leprosy.

Let's remember that we all suffer from a far more serious disease of the heart. We are all sinners who fall short of the glory of God. So first of all then, grace in the conflict.

[5 : 06] Grace in the conflict. The first words of our passage read, On the way to Jerusalem. On the way to Jerusalem. This whole section of Luke's gospel tells the story of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem.

And this journey is marked by many things, but chief among them is this, growing conflict with the religious leaders of Israel. Over the last few chapters of Luke, we've encountered Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees.

All of them have this one thing in common. They hate Jesus. They hate Him because He preaches a consistent message of the grace of God, that salvation from God is not according to our works, but that the kingdom of God is for the outcast and the sinner for the undeserving.

Salvation from God is not according to our obedience to man-made religious laws, not according to our religious performance. It's not according to our external actions and conformity to human standards.

It's entirely down to the undeserved favor of God, His invitation to command and believe in His Son Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[6 : 27] The heart of Jesus' religion is the religion of our hearts. So two religious cultures are clashing in this section of Luke. The religious culture of humanity trying to reach up to God by moral performance and religious devotion.

And the spiritual culture of Jesus where God is reaching down to humanity in grace and in love. It is the most fundamental of all conflicts.

How we relate to God, how we relate to each other, how we relate to ourselves. And as we say in English, the twain shall never meet. The religious culture of humanity is the polar opposite of the spiritual culture of Jesus.

And the history of the Bible is the history of this conflict. From Cain and Abel, to Saul and David, to the Pharisees and Jesus, to the Romans and the early church.

It's the reality of our world where the church is under extreme pressure from the world which is against it. Be it religious extremism, be it political oppression, be it atheistic antagonism.

[7 : 47] The church has always been in conflict. As the Christian church, how are we to respond? How did Jesus respond to the conflict He was enduring?

He's on His way to Jerusalem, where that conflict will climax in His arrest, His torture and execution. How does Jesus deal with the pressure and the conflict?

He continues to show love, compassion, grace and mercy to the undeserving. He's not waging a political campaign to conquer the religious elite of Israel.

He's showing grace and tenderness to ten leopards who can give Him nothing in return except their thanks. That's how we are to react when the world criticizes us and threatens the Christian church. We change nothing about what we do or say. We just get on with showing the grace and love of God to the undeserving and offering salvation to all who will believe in Jesus.

[8 : 57] We may be abused, but we shall not abuse in return. We may be insulted, but we shall keep calm. Not return insult for insult. We'll do what Jesus did when He met with these ten lepers.

Focus on the need of those in front of us and offer them the gospel and Jesus Christ. You know, it's easy to show grace when life is easy and the wind's behind us, but showing grace under pressure in a conflict zone is another matter.

But it's here, when the chips are down, our understanding and experience of God's grace in our lives is tested. When our Lord was under pressure, He responded by showing grace, mercy, and love to the outcast sufferer.

If we want to follow His example, we will also. Here we have Christianity in the raw, drawn up not in the ivory towers of a medieval monastery, but on the battlegrounds of our daily stressful lives.

But then we also have grace to the outsider here. Grace to the outsider. These ten lepers met Jesus on the way to Jerusalem as He passed between Samaria and Galilee.

[10 : 25] These ten men were outcasts in every sense of the word. Now, actually, we don't know if they were all men. Some of them might have been women. But it wasn't their gender that put them at a disadvantage in this case.

It was their medical condition and their ethnicity. It is hard to overestimate the impact of leprosy upon a person's life at that time.

Leprosy was a singularly painful condition, which more often than not, led to death by sepsis or some other infection. These ten lepers clearly weren't so advanced in their conditions that they couldn't walk and couldn't speak.

But such a state definitely lay ahead of them unless they were helped. Even so, they're in continual pain. But their physical pain is only the beginning of their suffering.

Socially, the leprosy left them cut off from everyone else in society. Because leprosy was regarded as a contagious disease, they had to leave their families and live either alone or in leper colonies.

[11 : 34] You see from verse 12 how they were standing at a distance. That's what lepers always did. They always stood at a distance from everyone because no one wanted them nearby.

Religiously, they were considered unclean, so were prohibited from worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem or even in a synagogue. They were outsiders.

They weren't welcome. As far as most people were concerned, lepers were dead men walking.

They'd be better off dead. During the COVID pandemic, can you believe it's five years ago, we had to stand in long lines waiting to get into the supermarket.

I had to do it in Morrison's and Iceland all the time. And we all wore masks and we're all outside. But if someone on that line coughed, you could see everyone else in that line suddenly go...

And they thought to themselves, well, maybe we'll come back later. And made their way to their cars. The fear of catching COVID meant that anyone with a cough was already on the outside.

[12 : 43] Multiply that by ten and you're kind of getting close to how the people of Jesus' day felt about lepers. But finally, there was one other issue which placed at least one of them on the outside.

As we'll see shortly, of the ten whom Jesus healed, at least one was a Samaritan. He wasn't a pure Jew. He was a half-breed. The Jews and Samaritans of the day had no dealings with each other. They viewed each other with suspicion. Perhaps like some Jews and some Palestinians in today's turbulent Middle East, they were on opposite sides of the fence.

In Jesus' day, Jews regarded Samaritans as subhuman, little better than animals, fodder for the judgment of God. So this man, this Samaritan, he's an outsider to the blessings of the temple in Jerusalem.

He's an outsider to the divine covenant and to the promises of the Word of God. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Jesus was not for him. This man wasn't of the blood.

[13 : 49] He was an outsider in every single way, medically, ethnically, socially, religiously. But it is to these ten lepers Jesus shows grace, the undeserved favor of God.

They call out to him, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And he saw them and said to them, Go, show yourself to the priests. To be pronounced clean, one had to receive a certificate from a priest that you were free of leprosy.

Without offering any arguments, they obey Jesus, and as they're walking to see the priest, the leprosy leaves them. They're cleansed. They're healed.

They obeyed, and they were healed. These outsiders, the last whom we would expect to be included in the kingdom of God, receive the grace of God and are cleansed.

Notice what they said in their request to him. Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. They knew they were outsiders.

[15 : 01] They knew they were socially, religiously, medically, and ethnically unclean. They knew they didn't deserve God's favor, had nothing to offer Jesus in return.

They knew it, so they pleaded with Jesus for mercy. Very few others in the Israel of Jesus' day felt the same way. We don't read of any Pharisees or any of the other religious leaders pleading for God's mercy, largely because they felt that they had earned God's favor by their religious obedience, and that they were deserving of their place in the kingdom of God.

They didn't feel their need of God's mercy, so they never asked for it. And as a result, they never received it. There's a lesson for us here.

There is no one in God's kingdom today except but by the mercy and grace of Christ. There is no one in God's kingdom today except by the mercy and grace of Christ, be it Abraham or Moses, be it Peter, be it Paul, be it the holiest Christian we have ever known.

The only people included in the kingdom of God are there because they sensed their need of God's mercy, and they cried out to Him in their need, and as a result, they freely received His grace.

[16 : 29] We cannot earn the cleansing and healing mercy and grace of Christ. The only way we shall receive it is by recognizing that by virtue of our sin, all of us are unworthy, and therefore, all of us need to cry out to Jesus for His mercy.

These ten lepers received it because they recognized that they were on the outside, and they called out to Jesus to show mercy upon them.

That's why C.S. Lewis said that grace is the distinguishing mark of Christianity, because it is only in Christianity God reaches down to us in mercy and grace rather than humanity reaching up to Him in obedience.

What then shall we all say to these things? Surely all of us want the healing power of Christ to cleanse our sinful hearts.

Surely all of us do. Jesus Himself here shows us that we shall not earn His healing power. We shall only receive it freely as we call out to Him for mercy and grace.

[17 : 43] This calling out to Him, this is what we call faith. It's the cry of a heart which recognizes its need of Christ.

Will we exercise faith in Jesus today? Will we cry out in our hearts to Him for His cleansing grace and His healing mercy, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy upon me.

Grace. Well then secondly and more briefly, gratitude, gratitude. How shall we respond to the grace of Christ?

How shall we respond? How did these ten lepers respond to the healing mercy of Christ? They'd been on the outside in every way, but Jesus had made them well. They'd been dirty in every way, but Jesus had made them clean.

On their way to the priest, they saw that they had been healed, but of the ten of them, only one turned back to thank Jesus. We read in verse 15, he turned back, praising God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks.

[18 : 59] Only one out of the ten, and this man a Samaritan, the most outside of them all, only he returned to give thanks to Jesus. The other nine were healed and cleansed, but out of them all, only this one turned back to praise God and give thanks to Jesus.

Our Lord responds, we're not ten cleansed. What are the other nine? Was no one found to give praise to God except for this foreigner?

Jesus clearly expects that the appropriate response to His grace from us must be our gratitude to Him to give thanks.

His grace must be followed by our gratitude, His saving word by our sincere worship. Paul, under whose guidance Luke wrote this gospel, in Romans 12 verse 1, says the same thing.

I appeal to you brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

[20 : 09] This is your spiritual worship. In view of God's mercy toward us in Christ, our gratitude consists! in offering everything we are and everything we have and everything we hope to be as a living sacrifice of worship to Him.

Christ's grace is followed by our sincere gratitude to Him and that gratitude takes the form of praise and worship. Not just the praise and worship of our lips, but the praise and worship of our transformed lives.

No longer do we live for ourselves, we live for Jesus. No longer do our ambitions and pleasures shape the course of our lives, but as Irene reminded us, in the kids' talk, it's the glory of King Jesus we love the most.

The nine went to the priests to get their healing approved. Then they went on with their lives as if nothing had happened. But the one went back to Jesus to praise God and give Him thanks.

Everything's changed in this man's life. His medical situation has been transformed and his heart has been changed. Jesus said to him, rise and go your way, your faith has made you well.

[21 : 25] The Samaritan leper's faith in Jesus Christ had led to his healing and his salvation. The mention of this Samaritan by Luke foreshadows how, in years to come, the kingdom of God will grow to include people from all kinds of nations.

The church and acts will be filled with Jews, but also Samaritans and also Gentiles. The gospel of Jesus Christ shall be believed upon even by the hated Samaritans and they along with their fellow Jewish Christians shall call each other brother, sister.

Samaritans shall enjoy this living and growing relationship with Jesus Christ. If the gospel's not for everyone, the gospel's for no one.

Christianity is evidenced today by its ethnic diversity. Believers from all nations becoming disciples of Christ.

The thing is, however, for however grateful this Samaritan leper was to Jesus for his healing, he never saw that which makes us as Christians so much more grateful than he.

[22 : 45] King David, whose psalms we love to sing, his psalms are filled with heartfelt expressions of praise and thanks, but he never saw the ultimate grace of God which prompts us to fall down before God and offer him our praise and thanks.

Because he never saw the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Messiah, who brought in and healed the outsider, he never saw him being crucified. He never saw Jesus arrest and torture.

He wasn't present at Jesus' sham trial. He didn't see Jesus carrying the cross up the Via Dolorosa to Mount Calvary. He never heard the nails being driven in to his hands and his feet.

He never saw the blood pouring from the head of Jesus. He didn't hear Jesus' agonizing cries. He didn't see Jesus' head dropping. As he gave up his spirit to God.

He didn't see Jesus being wrapped in grave clothes and being placed in a garden too. He didn't see the crying and the wailing of Jesus' mother and those who were present. He saw and heard nothing of Jesus' passion.

[24 : 00] Perhaps these lepers would not even have understood that it was not for his own sins but for ours that Jesus was being punished on the cross. It was not on account of his own guilt Jesus was being crucified but on account of ours.

He, the clean, was made unclean for us so that we might become clean. He became the outsider so that we might be brought in from the cold.

But not only did they not see his crucifixion, they did not see Jesus rising from the tomb on the third day. They never saw his triumphant resurrection, his ultimate victory over human disease and death.

The lepers never saw any of these things. And yet he fell down at Jesus' feet and praised God. He had faith in Jesus even though he never saw one of the things we did.

We have seen them. And to us has been proclaimed the message that if anyone here should have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he or she shall be cleansed of all their spiritual dirt, disease, and death.

[25 : 13] We have no excuse for not crying out in our hearts today to him, Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us. And having done that, having been saved by the blood of Jesus, we have even less excuse for not offering ourselves as living sacrifices for Jesus, but on account of his grace, we shall live lives of gratitude for him and to him.

The grace of Christ inspires. Our gratitude to Christ motivates. This is how to enter into and grow in our relationship with Jesus.

The longer we are Christians, the more grace we realize Jesus shows us, and the more grateful we are for him and to him.

Christianity is not about church buildings. It's about a living and growing relationship with Jesus Christ. It's about continually crying out to him for mercy, receiving his grace, and living a life of gratitude to him.

Are you a Christian today? Are you a Christian today? have you cried out in your heart to Jesus for his mercy?

[26 : 36] And are you living a life of gratitude to him? One final question. In what solid and practical ways today are you living out your gratitude for the grace of Jesus?