

One Out of Ten

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the Word of God as we find that in the passage we read in Luke chapter 17 and tonight we're looking especially at verses 11 to 19.

The account that we have here of the healing of these ten lepers that met with Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem. And we're still following this journey that Luke is giving us here in the main part of his gospel, the central part as he comes to give us an account of this journey of Jesus to Jerusalem.

So he's bringing out more and more of that question. We mentioned it this morning too that comes up so often in Luke. Who is he? Setting out his identity by way of what he is doing and what he is saying.

And the various parts of Christ's ministry that he records for us in this gospel. And the thing that we're seeing along with many other things is that this journey that Jesus was on to Jerusalem was just absolutely crammed full of events.

If there's one thing about the life of Jesus in this world that you admire, I know there's many things that you admire, but this is one of them. The sheer scale of the demands made upon him by so many people with so many different needs.

[1 : 25] And yet Jesus had time for them all and Jesus dealt with them as he saw best. And here again on this part of the journey, he comes to meet with these lepers and deals with them and heals them and then speaks to this one that came back.

We're not looking at the previous parts of the chapter. We're not going to actually look at every single verse of Luke. We're just moving on to look at the main features of the passages as we come towards the final part of his journey to Jerusalem.

And then the account Luke gives, of course, of the main events of Christ's life around the cross and then his resurrection. But it's interesting and important to look at the way the one thing leads into the next and how the challenge there in verse 3 that Jesus gave to his own disciples especially.

Pay attention to yourselves if your brother sins. Rebuke him if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in the day and turns to you seven times saying, I repent, you must forgive him.

And the apostle said to the Lord, Lord, increase our faith. You see, when Jesus made it clear that there are no limits to the number of times that we are to forgive those that need to be forgiven, the apostles realized the enormity of the kind of lifestyle that belongs to a disciple.

[3 : 02] And that they needed their faith to be strengthened, to be increased in order to deal with and cope with such demands as to forgive people constantly without limits.

And that then leads to the way Jesus spoke about faith and even having done everything as servants that we are still to say we are unworthy servants.

We have only done what was our duty. In other words, through all of that, he's emphasizing the important thing is not the scale of your faith, the size of your faith, though you needed to have it increased.

The important thing is what your faith is attached to. It's the object of your faith, the great and glorious and mighty God to whom your faith is connected and to whom you are connected by faith.

And that's what feeds into, again, the person of Jesus himself, where this God is revealed to us in such a glorious way, as now is demonstrated in this miracle of healing these ten lepers.

[4 : 13] So let's look at three things from the passage from verse 11. First of all, we can see the leper's cry, and secondly, the Lord's command, and thirdly, the lone compliment, the one leper who came back to pay compliment to Jesus to thank him for what he had done.

And in all of that, there are many points that are of importance for ourselves to consider. Look, first of all, at the leper's cry on the way to Jerusalem. Here is Luke again emphasizing this is what he's following, this path that Jesus had on the way to the cross.

He was passing along between Samaria and Galilee, and as he entered a village, it doesn't tell us which one it was, he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance.

Now we've already met with a leper in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus dealt with some time back, way back in chapter 5, verses 12 to 16.

So we mentioned there that lepers, by law, had to live separately from other people that didn't have this terrible disease.

[5 : 23] That was required under Old Testament regulations, and that was partly to do with quarantine in terms of not transmitting diseases, but also it had a spiritual significance in the Lord's own wisdom and way of setting it out.

So these lepers were actually living somewhere distant from the main body of people. They were not allowed to interact in a very close way with others in the community.

And of course, as we saw there in chapter 5, what that meant for them was that they were really outcasts. They were not included socially, as human beings want to be, in the goings on of people ordinarily.

They couldn't take part in the common things even that people share in together. They had to deal with that themselves. They had to just live by themselves in a colony somewhere distant from the rest.

So there was a tremendous amount hanging upon the healing of a leper for the leper. It was not just getting rid of the leprosy. It was getting rid of the ostracization, of the separation, of the way that they were socially excluded from society.

[6 : 43] And all of that comes into the healing of Jesus. That is what Jesus restores. He doesn't just restore health and cleanliness of skin to a leper.

But when he cleanses the leper, he heals the leper, he restores social inclusion. He restores companionship.

He restores things to be like they should have been. In the way they are able to share them with other people. So these ten lepers, that was their situation. And they cried out after Jesus.

Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. Now it's interesting that Luke records this exactly for us. Luke, of course, was a physician.

He was a doctor. He knew lots about the conditions that affected people physically. And indeed mentally too, but physically especially. And it's interesting that as he actually records for us the cry of the lepers, he records this word, mercy.

[7 : 45] They cried out after Jesus undoubtedly for their leprosy to be healed. That would be very much their desire. That would certainly be very much at the forefront of what they knew they needed.

And what they desperately wished for and longed for. And whatever view of Jesus, how they heard of him, were not told anything of the background. But they knew about him.

They knew who he was. They knew what he was able to do. So they came to him and cried out after him, have mercy on us. Seeking cleansing. Seeking help with their condition.

But they used the word mercy. That's important. Because there's a recognition in the use of that word.

That our human need goes much, much deeper than anything we might find on the physical level. And these ten lepers, as they cried out after Jesus, even if their primary concern was for the healing of their bodies from this disease of leprosy.

[8 : 53] They used the word mercy because they recognized that it is mercy indeed to them that needs to be shown if even this is done for them. If even the very least thing were to be done for them.

And that's not a small thing they're asking for. But it's to do with mercy. How little we do realize.

Well, everything the Lord gives us, in one sense, is big with benefit. But how much do we realize that even what we regard as the smallest gifts from God, the everyday benefits we receive, the comforts we have in ordinary life, that they flow from the mercy of God.

That it is by the mercies of this great God that we actually live from day to day. And as we come to ask anything of God, we should ask on the basis of mercy.

Not just the forgiveness of our sins, which of course is seeking mercy and coming on the grounds of mercy, as David did in Psalm 51 with his great confession of sin.

[10 : 13] Lord, according to your tender mercies, be merciful to me. It's not just when we come with our sin, but when you come for whatever you ask, you have to recognize that such is our need spiritually, and such is our unworthiness to receive anything good from the Lord.

That we come like a beggar, holding out our empty bowl to God and saying, Lord, be merciful. To me, the sinner, give me in accordance with my need, as you know it, give me, but help me to realize that it is in mercy that you give, and it's in mercy that I receive.

How deep then tonight is our sense of need? What do we pray for? With what kind of mind do we pray? Do we just pray for things without realizing that the things and the possessions that we can legitimately pray for, that they themselves come to us by the mercies of God?

Every day we open our eyes. As the old folks used to put it very often in prayer, we are on mercy's ground.

We have mercy to approach. We have mercy available to us. We have the ground of mercy from which we are given so many benefits, even the food that we eat.

[11 : 50] We come on the basis of God's mercy because we deserve none of it. But it's opposite. It's, as somebody put it, as we look at what the grace of God really is like, and what the grace of God enables us to do as we come to God and pray to him, and cry out after him that he will meet our need, our smallest needs and our greatest needs.

For our need is great. But as somebody put it, because there's such a thing as mercy, what you find here is that here are people who have no right to expect anything, and yet they're able to ask for everything.

And that's really how it is for you and for me. What right do we have when we have turned against God, when we know that the Bible's teaching on our sin is such that God hates that sin, and we have come rebelliously to turn away from God in our fall from what he created?

We don't deserve anything good from God. I know a lot of people nowadays will say, that's really being very negative, isn't it?

That's really being very dark. That kind of religion doesn't appeal to us anymore. Well, how are we going to receive what the Bible tells us we need to receive forgiveness, unless we understand what mercy is.

[13 : 28] And we can't understand what mercy is unless we understand that it's merciful to the undeserving. Because there is no other way you can understand mercy.

If there was anything that God gives you that you deserved, it would not be mercy at all. And mercy would lose its meaning if there was a shred of merit in your life or mine to receive benefit from God.

Yes, it may be dark to the way people think about things nowadays. It may be dark even to some theologians and some versions that Christians have of what the gospel is. It is not dark to actually say this is what the Bible teaches, when it's really the way that the glory of forgiveness, the brightness of God's forgiveness, is brought out and highlighted against the darkness of our sin and what we deserve.

Lord, have mercy on us, is what they cried out. Be merciful to us. And then the Lord turns to them when he saw them.

Secondly, we come to the Lord's command. When he saw them, he said to them, go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed.

[14 : 56] Now isn't it interesting that the more you go on and looking at the gospel of Luke, and this is one of the benefits of studying it closely and taking our time going through it and seeing more of the detail of it than just skimming over it.

You can see how the life of Jesus as it's packed with all of these events is also one that meets with increasing hostility as he goes on and gets nearer to Jerusalem.

It's not a matter for Jesus that the longer he goes on on his journey and the more people get to know him and get to hear him and get to see what he's doing in works that are miraculous, the less the opposition becomes.

It's the opposite. The more Jesus goes on as you find this in Luke's gospel and the other gospels too, and the more people see what he's doing and the more he tells of what his ministry is about, the opposition from those who want rid of him actually increases.

And however great the miracles are, there is still an increasing hostility to what he's doing. You've only got to go to John's account of the raising of Lazarus, one of the most remarkable events recorded in the Bible.

[16 : 15] And yet those who hated Jesus and wanted to be rid of him had even more against him because of what he did to Lazarus because people were coming and following him and attaching themselves to him.

And you read in John's gospel there that not only did they want to put Jesus to death, but they wanted to put Lazarus to death too because he was so closely connected to this Christ.

Why am I saying that? Why is that important? Well, it's important because the more you see the hostility against Jesus growing in its intensity, it doesn't in any way put Jesus off being compassionate to those in need.

And that truly is a great point for us to take with us tonight. When these lepers turned round and cried out after him, be merciful to us.

You don't find the Lord saying, look, my life is so busy and there's so much hostility and you people don't deserve that I should do these things for you anymore. I'm just going to keep on my way.

[17 : 27] He stopped and he had time for them and he showed compassion to them. That's the kind of Lord that people despise. That's the kind of Jesus that people reject.

That's the kind of Lord who looks after his people. Who is not deflected from anything that he sees in us or in the world around us.

And who continued his great acts of mercy and grace and compassion against and despite the increasing hostility that he met with on the way to the cross.

And even when he came to the cross and as they were attaching him to the cross, even then, even in that extremity of suffering and of opposition to him.

What did he say? Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Who is this man?

[18 : 42] Who is this person? See, that's what Luke is bringing out as we're repeatedly saying. And the only reason we're repeating it is because Luke repeats it. And because this great book of Luke is throwing it at us and saying to us, this is who he is.

This is the kind of person he is. This is the grandeur of this person. This is the enormity of this Jesus. This is the unfathomable dignity of this person.

There is no one like him. How beautiful he is brought out even at this point of dealing with these lepers. Well, what does he say to them? He says, Go and show yourselves to the priests.

As they went, they were cleansed. Now stop over those words and compare them with what the Old Testament required of lepers. And compare them with chapter 5 and the healing of the leper in chapter 5.

If you compare it there with that particular passage, Jesus reached out and he actually touched the leper on that occasion saying, I will be clean.

[19 : 52] And immediately the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing as Moses commanded for a proof to them.

In other words, the priest was, the priest was actually appointed by God as, you might say, a kind of health inspector. so that if somebody was cleansed from leprosy or claimed to have been cleansed from leprosy, they had to be very careful to make sure that that was indeed the case before they let them back into society again.

So the priest was charged with making a pronouncement either, yes, this person is now completely clean and free of leprosy and can be readmitted to society or else, if the person was making a false claim then the priest would have to say, I'm sorry, but that's not the case.

You're not clean. You can't come back. But what's different here is that Jesus tells these lepers to go and show themselves to the priest before they had been cleansed.

And that's really significant. Why is it significant? Because he was putting them to the test. They had cried out after him as somebody who was able to cleanse them, to heal them from their leprosy and he was testing them now to see if they would actually do exactly as he said and therefore receive the benefit that they asked.

[21 : 27] Go and show yourself to the priests. They could have said, we might have expected even that they would say, but we can't show ourselves to the priest yet because we've still got our leprosy.

All Jesus said to them was, go, show yourself to the priests and as they went, they were healed. Isn't that interesting?

And it's more than interesting, it's significant because there are many people under the gospel that have exactly the same mindset, that think they can't make any progress yet until something that they themselves think needs to happen has happened first.

what does Jesus require? He requires you to do what he says. And if he says, believe in me, then that's what he requires.

If he says, believe that by trusting in me, your sins are forgiven, then that is how it is. He doesn't actually say, don't actually come and make yourself a disciple of mine and begin to follow me until you're absolutely sure that you've been saved, until you understand much of what it means to receive forgiveness of sin and to understand the things of salvation.

[22 : 54] Jesus is saying, obey me, give your life to me, do it, and you'll be saved. And you see, it's the same as for these lepers.

As they went, they were cleansed. They took Jesus at his word, they did exactly as he was requiring of, as he commanded them, they went and as they were on their way, they were cleansed.

And when you come to do what the Lord tells you to do, as you turn to do it, you will meet with salvation as you do so.

Salvation will meet you in the step of obedience. And you will not meet with it until you've taken that step of obedience.

Sometimes we are guilty in preaching the gospel as much as perhaps yourselves of reading the Bible and thinking about things.

[24 : 04] guilty of really making faith so difficult, so complicated, and perhaps giving the impression that unless you have a certain level of understanding about what faith itself is, and what commitment to Christ is, before you commit yourself to Christ, that you can't do it until you have that beforehand.

stand. This is telling you, no, do it. And you will meet with all that he promises as you take out, as you step out in faith, to commit yourself to him.

As they went on their way, they were cleansed. there are some, probably here tonight, who need this word from the Lord, who need the assurance that this passage gives us, that we are not to wait until something spectacular happens in our lives, that we are not to wait until we have got something that is like what somebody else has, that we are not to wait until we ourselves think within a right position and have a right grasp and understanding in order that we can then come to commit our life to Jesus.

What he's encouraging you to think of yourself tonight is simply this. Take my word as truth, he's saying.

You believe in God, believe also in me. that's it. Nothing else is required.

[25 : 57] You have everything in Jesus himself. You have everything that's required for your life, for your soul, in Christ himself. What is wrong with us is that we try to add to that.

We need Jesus plus my understanding, Jesus plus my work, Jesus plus my level of prayerfulness, Jesus plus what I myself is able to do so that I can be like others that I see around me.

Don't add anything to Christ. Just reading, coming back last week from my break, I read these words and they stayed with me.

It's in the form of an arithmetic or mathematical equation. And even if you were never good at maths like me, I was never good at maths, but even if you weren't and I wasn't, this is very easy to follow.

And it's hugely important. It's this. Jesus plus nothing equals everything.

[27 : 07] Everything minus Jesus equals nothing. Let's say it again. Jesus plus nothing.

Jesus plus nothing. You don't add anything to him, but you still have everything. Jesus plus nothing equals everything. And if you begin with everything, minus Jesus, it equals nothing.

As they went, they were cleansed. they were cleansed when they responded obediently to his own command. Do it and you will meet with cleansing as you do.

Remember Naaman in the Old Testament in 2nd Kings chapter 5. When Elisha came to him and instructed him what he was to do, to go and wash in the Jordan.

His first reaction was, I don't think that's a good idea. I don't like that idea. Are not the rivers of Damascus, are they not as good as the waters of the Jordan?

[28 : 26] Are not these waters that I'm used to myself, are they not in fact better than the waters of the Jordan? Can I not bathe in them and be cleansed? He was a leper too. No, he couldn't.

He could only receive cleansing by obeying the instruction that God sent him through Elisha. And that's what he did. And he ended up, as the Bible tells us, his flesh was as pure and smooth as a little child.

That's what God does. But he does it through means. And the means he uses are the means that he commands us to use.

And by obedience to his command, you come to receive that cleansing. So, what he's really saying to us tonight is, no buts.

Yes, this is the command of Christ, come to me and I will give you peace for your soul. Come to me and you will be saved. Don't say in response, yes, I want to come, but there are no buts.

[29 : 44] There are no buts allowed for you. You don't need anything but what he has given you and what he provides for you. We spend a bit of time on the point, but it's very significant because that's how Luke records it for us.

so that we'll take with us this tremendously important issue that is to act upon Christ's word. That's what's required of us.

Everything else follows from that. the Lord's command. Thirdly, there is the lone compliment. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

He fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Again, Luke records that because he's done that before. He told us about a good Samaritan.

Samaritan. The priest and the Levite, in contrast, neglected the poor man who had been mugged by the roadside. It was the Samaritan who dealt with him and cared for him.

[30 : 50] And what Luke is doing is showing us how Jesus in his teaching was aiming so many arrows at the Pharisees, at the self-righteousness of the Pharisees, who thought that they were so much better, especially than the likes of Samaritans.

And tax collectors, as you find in the next chapter. And what Jesus is saying to them, out of the ten lepers that were cleansed, and we're presuming that, although it's not specified, that because it says this one was a Samaritan, that the other ten were not.

The other nine were not. In any case, this is the one that came back. The one that was regarded perhaps as least likely to come back.

And that the Pharisees would think of us utterly unworthy of receiving anything at all. He came back to give praise to the Christ who had cleansed him.

Friends, there are many in the world tonight, and I hope there's none in this building, but we are all guilty of coming short in so many ways, including this in the element of thanksgiving.

[32 : 02] But there are many in the world who receive many benefits from God every day. We never bother to come back to thank him. Only one out of the ten came back to thank the Lord for what he had done for him.

We can enjoy many benefits from God and remain totally unthankful. We can even receive healing from God and not come to be grateful and place our trust and faith in him.

It's possible to have leprosy cleansed and not be saved. It's possible to have many benefits from God and think lightly of them and not make them a means by which we come to give our thanks to the God who gave them in mercy to us.

And that's why there's such a strong question on the part of Jesus. When this man came back and gave him thanks with a loud voice and prostrated himself in humble thanksgiving, Jesus answered, were not ten cleansed?

Where then are the nine? And literally, as Luke puts it in, it doesn't come out perhaps quite as strongly in the translation, were not ten cleansed? The nine! What about them?

[33 : 31] That's what Jesus said. The nine, where are they? Who knows why they didn't come back? They all, I'm sure, had different reasons for not bothering to come back.

Some may have thought that, well, they would have been cured anyway somehow. Some may have thought that they were already in the process of being healed before they met Jesus.

Many reasons why people don't thank God. But if there's one thing that shows whether or not we've been saved, it's surely this, whether or not we constantly give him thanks.

a life that gives no thanks to God is a worthless life. It's a life that doesn't know what it is to receive benefits, that doesn't appreciate the mercy of God.

Humble thanksgiving is in fact one of the great points the passage makes, and one of the great requirements, and indeed becomes the proof that we have been, or a proof that we have been saved.

[34 : 53] You cannot have received salvation without responding in thanksgiving. Our thanksgiving is never as big, as constant, as frequent as it should be.

But every soul that has received and acknowledges the gift that God has given them responds with thanksgiving, when they have received his forgiveness, when they have received his acceptance, when they have received salvation, they thank him.

They come back to give their thanks on their knees to him. We live in a world when so many things are regarded as necessary.

You've only had to look at your television and the adverts that you find there, and in the shops, and on posters, and towns, and whatever. At this time of year especially, you have projected at you countless times, countless number of things that you are actually, an attempt is being made to persuade you.

You actually need this. And even if you don't need it, you still should have it. And especially because it's Christmas. Christmas. Well, when you go through the Bible, and you can go through the Bible and very easily make up a list very quickly of the things for which we are to give thanks to God.

[36 : 29] And there are many, many things mentioned. But there are things like God's mercies, God's forgiveness, God's salvation, God's companionship, God's church, God's gospel, God's word, God's help, God's deliverance, fellowship with one another, the love of other Christians, the support of the church.

It's very rarely you'll come across a reference in scripture to Christians called to give thanks for things.

Because actually, they're not really of great importance compared to the matters that God himself specifies we are to be thankful for.

And yet, that's what the world largely places value and meaning upon in the world that you and I live in today. Things, possessions, material things, bodily things, physical things, and physicality itself to the neglect of our souls.

And Jesus is telling us, by this one man's return to give him thanks, that our thanksgiving is primarily not for things and not for possessions.

[37 : 57] Yes, we do give thanks for that. Yes, of course we do. I'm not suggesting we don't include that in our thanksgivings. But they're not the primary reason for our thanks. We thank God, especially first and foremost, for himself, for his mercies, for his goodness, for all that he gives us spiritually to enjoy.

And that's what gives value and meaning to our lives too, when they are filled with a right thanksgiving.

Right up to 1973, in a small coastal town in Florida, an old man could be seen every Friday night, every Friday evening, carrying a bucket full of shrimps.

And from the shrimps, he threw them out to feed the seagulls. And he did this every Friday night, for most of his life, right up to the time he died, in 1973.

His name was Eddie Rickenbacker. Eddie had been on a bombing mission in the Second World War. He was in a B-17.

[39 : 15] And they were to bring a very important message to General MacArthur in New Guinea, in the Pacific. But the plane went out of a radio range, and they got lost, and eventually ran out of fuel, and they had to ditch in the sea.

And for a whole month, he and his companions who survived the ditching in the sea, lived on a small raft, with sharks around them, with many other things that they had to fight off, rough weather, bright sunshine, scorching heat.

But the biggest enemy they had was starvation. They knew that's what would kill them, more than anything else.

things. And when the Russians had eventually run out, they had a short service every day, they had the book with them, the service book that they carried in the forces.

And this particular morning, one of them read the service for the day, and then he prayed, and finished with a hymn. And he prayed, before he sang the hymn, he prayed for deliverance from God.

[40 : 34] God, that God would send help, would send salvation to them. And Eddie, after the service was over, to prevent the scorching sun burning his face, he pulled his hat down over his eyes and just slouched back a bit and began to doze off in the heat.

And then all of a sudden he felt something land on his head. hundreds of miles from the nearest shore, and there was a seagull, and it actually landed on top of his head.

And of course the others in the raft immediately saw the seagull on Eddie's head, and their first thoughts were, that's food. Eddie caught the seagull, they gilded, they ate it, they used part of it for bait, and managed to catch fish, and they survived the rest of their time until they were rescued.

Think of that old man, right up to 1973, with his pail of shrimps, in that coastal town in Florida, throwing the shrimps out to the seagulls.

Why? To honor and to remember that one seagull that had given its life to save his.

[42 : 11] What a great reason we have when we think that Christ gave himself. What a great reason we have to be thankful that God and mercy remembered us to that extent that his own dear son gave himself so that we might live.

Thanks be to God, said Paul, for his inexpressible gift and strength. O Lord, O God, help us always to be thankful.

Help us, we pray, especially to be thankful in the light of your great mercies, especially as these have been impersonated for us in your own son.

Help us to be thankful for everything we receive, for all the good things you show to us and extend to us each and every day. O Lord, we ask that our greatest act of thankfulness may be that we deliver ourselves over to you, that you might be our Lord and Saviour too.

Hear us now, we pray, bless the food prepared for us and our fellowship now as we come to meet together. In all of this we give thanks for Jesus' sake.

[43 : 40] Amen.