

Luke 17:11-19 PM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 November 2024

Preacher: Rev. Will Gray

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, open our ears to listen, open our eyes to see, plant the seed of your word deep in our hearts, and make it bear good fruit in our lives.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. So just to add my welcome to Zellas, my name is Will. I'm one of the ministers on staff here at St. John's, and if you're new or visiting, I'd love to meet you after the service.

So it'd be great if you could turn to Luke 17, that's page 876 that Kathy's just read for us, and have that open as we go. That would be really helpful. So if you're coming, if you're visiting this evening, this fall we've been doing a deep dive in the middle section of Luke's Gospel.

And in these chapters, Jesus has been on his way to Jerusalem. He's been approaching the cross. And as he's been on his way to Jerusalem, he's been inviting, urging, even compelling people to enter his kingdom of grace.

His teachings these last few months have been full of grace and full of warning. Jesus has repeatedly used images of feasting and banquets and parties to show the abundance and lavish goodness of life with him in his kingdom.

[1 : 24] But he's also given us sobering warnings about things like complacency, pride, and the love of money that can keep us from entering into the fullness of his joy.

And all along, Jesus has been pressing us. He's been pressing us to see things like work, money, and friendship from the eternal perspective of his kingdom, and to actually respond accordingly. And it's very fitting that we're ending this series here in Luke 17. This story of the ten lepers is a brilliant story that gets to the very heart of what Luke wants us to know about Jesus and our response to him.

And here's the main point. Here's the big takeaway. It's not enough to encounter Jesus or even to benefit from his mercy.

The point of salvation is to be near to Jesus and to enjoy God forever. In other words, God's mercy is meant to turn our hearts to him in worship.

[2 : 33] This is what we were made for. This is what makes heaven paradise. This is the deepest longing and the supreme joy of the human heart. And we have not really grasped what Jesus has been teaching us in these chapters of Luke until the supreme treasure of our hearts and desire of our lives is to be with God, to glorify him, and to enjoy him forever.

So keep that in mind as we're going. But we're going to dive into the passage. And very simply, we're going to look at two things. Two things. First, the mercy of Jesus for the least and the lost. And second, our response to this mercy. So the mercy of Jesus and our response to his mercy. So first, the mercy of Jesus for the least and the lost.

In verse 11, Luke tells us that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and passing between Samaria and Galilee when he met a group of ten lepers who cry out to him, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

Now, none of these details that Luke gives are incidental or accidental. Most of the details in the Bible aren't. Luke is intentionally painting a picture here of who God is and just how far Jesus will go to bring this invitation, the invitation into his kingdom of grace.

[4 : 08] Some of you may know Samaria was a region north of Jerusalem between Judea and Galilee. And there were longstanding hostilities between the Jewish and Samaritan people.

The Samaritans were ethnically a mix of Jewish and Gentile, and they practiced a kind of distorted version of Hebrew Old Testament faith.

And so most Jewish people, if they were traveling between Judea and Galilee, would actually take a much longer route to avoid Samaria altogether.

So they wouldn't run into any of the unclean, unsavory Samaritans. But of course, we know that Jesus doesn't always do this.

There's multiple times in the gospel where Jesus travels in and through and near to Samaria. And he does this because Jesus is the one that came to seek and save the lost.

[5 : 08] That's what we find out in Luke's gospel. And if this were not enough, that Jesus is traveling close to Samaria and those unclean Samaritans, the men who cry out to Jesus for mercy are lepers.

In the first century, leprosy covered a whole range of skin conditions. But the main thing for us to know is that lepers were considered unclean. And this meant they were forced to live in their own colonies, completely isolated from the rest of society.

This meant that they were in a very real way cut off. Cut off from family. Cut off from friends. Even cut off from the religious and worshiping life of God's people.

And this is why these men were standing at a distance from Jesus. This is actually how they lived their whole lives. At a distance, alone, cast out.

And so they cried to Jesus for mercy. And this word mercy conveys pity, compassion, or concern for someone who's in need.

[6 : 19] It's significant that the men don't ask for grace or forgiveness or salvation. They ask for mercy. They have a dire, immediate need. And they ask Jesus for help.

And of course, Jesus does not turn them away. He doesn't ignore their cries. It may seem a bit odd to us that Jesus sends them to the priests.

But he does this because the priests were the ones who would actually determine if a person was clean or unclean. And could actually restore an unclean person back to the community and back to life.

And so Jesus sends them to the priests. And on the way, they are miraculously cleansed. It's hard to overstate the significance of this.

Jesus doesn't just heal these men's bodies. He makes them clean. This means they're able to go back to their families, to friends, to work, to community, and worship.

[7 : 22] In a very real way, Jesus gave these men, who are at the very bottom of the barrel, a new life. And we see Jesus doing this over and over and over again in the Gospels.

We see Jesus reaching out to the least, the last, and the lost, renewing them, giving them dignity and life. And it's really easy to think, it's really easy to think that our sin, our weakness, our desperate need, makes us repellent or repulsive to God.

Or at least mildly disappointing. Right? I'll speak for myself. I've asked myself many times, how could a perfect, holy, infinitely good God want to be with or near someone like me?

Someone so weak, so needy, so sinful and selfish and double-minded. But Jesus reveals that this is the exact opposite.

In Jesus, we see what God is really like. We see that he really is the Lord, who is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

[8 : 42] And before we go on to the next part of the passage, I want to just ask you, I want to ask all of you here today, do you believe this? Do you believe this? God isn't hiding anything.

There isn't going to come a day that you find out that God is actually different than what we see in the person of Jesus. Disappointed, demeaning, demanding, overbearing.

Jesus said that he is gentle and lowly in heart. And his heart reveals God's heart because he's God incarnate, God with us. And so God, far from being repulsed by our neediness, is actually drawn towards our neediness, drawn towards us in mercy.

This is, of course, why Jesus came. He said, I came to seek and save the lost, to bring lost people into the joy of God's salvation.

And so in mercy, in compassion, Jesus heals and cleanses these 10 men and sends them away to be restored. This comes to our second point, the response.

[10 : 00] How did these men respond? And what does this teach us about our response to Jesus? Well, we don't know exactly what nine of the men did.

But I think it's fair to assume that they went back to living their lives, right? They went back to their families, to their work, to the temple, to their communities.

And Luke certainly doesn't say that they were ungrateful. How could they have possibly been ungrateful for this incredible gift that Jesus gave them? Jesus changed their lives.

They likely thought of Jesus with gratitude every time they ate a meal with their families or walked through the market or went to the temple to pray. But, and this is the key thing, they didn't return to Jesus.

Only one of the 10, a Samaritan of all people, returned praising God and giving thanks for this incredible gift that he had received.

[11:07] The nine men got what they desired from Jesus. They cried out to him for help, and full of mercy, he gave them what they wanted.

Healing, family, friendship, belonging, respect, dignity. And don't get me wrong, these are all very good things. They're things that we should want for everyone that we encounter.

But only the one man, awakened by God's mercy, wanted something more. He wanted something deeper. He wanted to be with Jesus and to praise God.

The one man's response went beyond gratitude to worship. He realized that in Jesus, God's own love and power and mercy had taken hold of him, healed him, and made him a new man.

And this is why we see that he turns back, praising God with a loud voice, falling at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. This is worship. This is pure, true worship.

[12:16] And look at Jesus' response in verse 17. Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God, except this foreigner?

Now, Jesus' mercy is freely given. There's no strings attached. And yet, I think what we see here is that Jesus' mercy is ultimately meant to point us to something even greater.

And that's his gift of salvation and new life. Look what he says to the man. He says, Rise, go on your way. Your faith has made you well.

That last phrase, you might see a footnote in your Bible, can also be translated as your faith has saved you. That's the salvation word. You could say, Your faith has made you well.

Your faith has saved you. Your faith has made you whole. So all ten of the lepers were cleansed, but only the one who returned to Jesus in worship received something unique.

[13:22] He was saved. His response reveals the mark of true salvation and inner transformation in Christ, which is true worship of the living God.

And by the mercy and compassion of God, we receive all kinds of good things in this life. But the richest gift that we receive in Christ is God himself.

His presence, his kingdom, his promise, life, glory, and grace. There's a few places in scripture where God gives us pictures of this heavenly feast that he's preparing for all who love him, and which Jesus has been talking about all throughout these chapters in Luke.

Personally, my favorite is Isaiah 25. In Isaiah 25, the prophet describes how the Lord himself, the Lord of hosts, will make for his people a feast of the richest foods and the finest wines, where he will swallow up the veil of darkness, swallow up death itself, and wipe the tears from all faces.

And do you know what the people at this feast say after the Lord has done all of this? They say, Behold, this is our God. We have waited for him that he might save us.

[14:45] This is the Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Friends, the very best part of entering Jesus' kingdom and joining in his heavenly feast is that we will be with our Lord and enjoy him forever.

All of our worship, what we're doing here tonight, is a preparation for that day. The most profound beauty and love and joy that you experience in this life will pale in comparison to seeing God face to face.

In that moment, we will finally be able to rest, really and truly rest, because all of our deepest joys and longings will be perfectly, fully, and finally fulfilled.

It will be better than we can possibly imagine. And Jesus shows us here that it is possible to miss it altogether.

I think the nine men in this story were too easily pleased. They experienced Jesus' mercy in a tangible, even miraculous way, and yet they did not enter into the fullness of his presence and joy.

[16:12] I wonder if you noticed the nine men never actually draw near to Jesus in the story. They start off at a distance crying out to him.

They're cleansed and healed as they're on their way to the priest, and they never return to him.

They never draw near. And this, I think, is the warning of the story.

If our sole focus is this life and the things of this life, even the very good things of this life that God gives us in his mercy, we can encounter Jesus, experience his goodness, and still miss out on the

joy of his salvation.

Because the joy of salvation is the presence and glory of God. It's like we heard in Psalm 16. David said, In your presence, Lord, is fullness of joy.

The joy of salvation is the presence and glory of God. And this is why Jesus has been urging us for weeks now to come.

[17:19] Come now. Come quickly. Enter the narrow gate. Come to the feast. Give yourself fully and freely to Jesus. Because there's nothing better than being near to our Lord, glorifying him and enjoying him now and forever.

Amen. Amen. Amen.