

Encounters with Jesus

Week 7 - Jesus and the Ten Lepers (Luke 17:11-19)

Context:

In this passage, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, traveling on the outskirts of Samaria. If Matthew, on the one hand, focuses on all of the ways which Jesus is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Israel, Luke focuses on the way Jesus is also "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32). Jesus came to be a light to Samaria just as he was a light unto Israel. In the encounter today, Jesus, like the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), turns aside on his journey to help those in need — ten lepers in this case. But while ten went away changed, only one of them was truly transformed.

1. The Need for Mercy (vv. 11-13)

- a. Leprosy resulted in complete separation from others
 - having leprosy meant that you were ritually unclean and anything which touched you was ritually unclean
 - resulted in separation from family, from religious life, and from the entire community; treated by many as cursed by God even though it was possible for anyone, regardless of their spiritual condition, to catch leprosy
- b. They Need Mercy
 - They recognize that Jesus is the "Master" and cry out for mercy
 - In their position, they understood quite clearly that they were in desperate need of mercy
 - In our pride, we can become so self-reliant and self-absorbed that it becomes impossible to admit our weakness and ask for mercy
 - Fear of rejection can also keep us from admitting when we are in need
 - Jesus extends mercy and restores them completely, even though they did not ask to be healed - this was not only a physical healing, but restored them to their families and the larger community

Jesus extends mercy to those who are suffering and sends us to extend mercy to those who are suffering, as his hands and feet.

2. True Mercy Received (vv. 14-16)

- a. Ten Healed Physically
 - Jesus does not lay hands on them or even say be healed, but commands them to show themselves to the priest
 - They are only healed *after* they respond to Jesus' command and head to the priest
- b. Only one Healed Truly
 - Only one of the ten—and a Samaritan!—responded to Jesus in gratitude, praising God and falling at Jesus' feet
 - Samaritans, who were descended from intermarriage with pagan Gentiles, were hated by the Jews passionately, but here, as in Jesus' parable, it is the Samaritan who did right in God's sight
- c. God loves the Outcasts
 - In God's kingdom, those who are the least likely to get the blessing in worldly terms are uplifted — the centurion, the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery, etc. — these are the ones who believe, recognizing their need and acknowledging Jesus
 - Eternal life is given to the one who believes, regardless of their status in worldly terms
 - If you are an outsider, God's kingdom is for you!

3. The Response to Mercy

- a. Mercy Leads to Gratitude and Joy
 - All ten of the lepers were grateful, but only one was concerned about directing gratitude toward Jesus
 - How often do we enjoy the benefits, but ignore the benefactor! How often does our gratitude last only a moment, but fail to produce long term change!
 - In the midst of entitlement and pride, we become ungrateful and discontent, but in humility and gratitude we experience deeper contentedness

- b. Fanny Crosby: blinded by a doctors error at 6 weeks old, but went on to write 8000 hymns, including this one at 8 years old:

“Oh, what a happy child I am,
Although I cannot see!
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be!

How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't!
To weep or sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot and I won't.”

Gratitude does not cause God to love us more, but as the Spirit empowers us toward gratitude, we are able to experience a greater fullness in the love and grace of God in the midst of it. We are all in desperate need, even more than we could ever know, and God freely pours out his mercy upon you!

(Discussion questions on next page)

Discussion Questions

1. What struck you most about this passage? Is there anything in particular you may have missed before, or something you thought about in a new way?
2. Think about what it would have been like to have leprosy — separated from family, friends, community, and even worship, with no hope of ever returning. How does knowing all of this help you understand the significance of what Jesus did for them in healing them?

How can you relate to the leper?

3. While we may all be able to relate to the leper, we are also regularly tempted to look down on others or to create our own “in” and “out” groups. Jesus, however, always shows particular concern for those who are outcasts. How does Jesus’ attitude challenge your own?

How does the way we interact with others relate to our relationship with God? What are some things we should keep in mind, especially when we are around those who might naturally be tempted to treat poorly?

4. One of the most important spiritual disciplines is specifically meditating on the ways that God has been faithful to you in the past—returning to those “monuments,” so to speak.

If you had to pick one key event in your life that would be a major monument of your life, what would it be? How does meditating on experiences like this give you strength and help you express gratitude even in difficult times?

5. What is something that you are most grateful for this week?