



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 17:11-19

To understand more about the healing of the ten lepers.

Jerusalem Is Still the Target

Verse 11 picks up by reminding Luke's readers, yet again, of the eventual target for which Jesus is aiming: "On the way to Jerusalem." This is sixth time since the Transfiguration (Lk. 9:31, 51, 53; 13:22, 33; 17:11) that Luke has reminded his audience that Jesus is moving closer and closer towards the holy city wherein He will be ultimately crucified and raised from the dead. In this particular story, Luke also mentions that Jesus was "passing between Samaria and Galilee," which is a strange thing to say given the geographical positioning of each, but likely it means that Jesus was traveling through the valley of Jezreel. Jesus and His disciples likely would have moved from Galilee to Samaria, and not the other way around, and yet Samaria is named first. This is likely to highlight the Samaritan presence in this story concerning the lepers over and above the Jewish lepers, all of whom are healed by Jesus.

The Lepers

In verse 12, Jesus enters an unnamed village and "was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance." James Edwards adds, "It would be natural, however, for ritually unclean lepers to congregate in a small and remote town elsewhere in the Decapolis, for the Decapolis, which hosted many Gentiles, including the Roman army, was considered ritually 'unclean.'"¹ In keeping with cultural norms, the lepers stayed off a distance from Jesus, but called out to Him: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (Lk. 17:13). It is significant that they refer to

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 483.

Jesus as “Master,” given this is a title typically reserved solely for the disciples. This indicates they recognized that Jesus was more than merely a Teacher, as most of the rest of the crowds addressed Him. Verse 14 records Jesus’ response, both in word and deed: “When he saw them he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went they were cleansed.” Jesus’ command to go see the priests would have followed Levitical procedure in that they needed to be examined by a priest before being re-established back into the community. It is at this point that the story focuses on the Samaritan leper who returns to Jesus. Below is a breakdown of some of the key details.

THE RIGHT RESPONSE

Verses 15 and 16 continue: “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.” The response is indicative of a heart that understands that ultimately, the cleansing comes from God Himself, and thus God is deserving of praise. It reflects the sentiment of Psalm 30:10-12: “Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me! O LORD, be my helper! You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” The leper connects the goodness and mercy of God to this miraculous healing and thus he is moved to “praise God with a loud voice.” Unlike the other nine who simply went to the priests, this one understood that something else was going on behind the scenes.

A SAMARITAN

It is an especially interesting detail that this grateful healed leper is a Samaritan. Already in Luke’s Gospel we have established the clear division between Jews and Samaritans (Lk. 10:25-37); this detail only further challenges the Jewish idea that Samaritans were outcasts. The language of “foreigner” in verse 18 is significant as well, as it is the same language used to restrict Gentiles from the Temple. David Garland adds: “It is also significant that Jesus’ term for the Samaritan as a “foreigner” (ἀλλογενής) is the same term that appears on the inscriptions found on the balustrades surrounding the temple warning that “no alien” (μηθένα ἀλλογενής) may go beyond this point and will suffer the penalty of death if they are caught doing so. One alienated from the temple is not alienated from God but is considered a part of Israel and “saved” apart from the temple.² While the alien could not enter the Temple, it did not stop God from meeting him in his uncleanness and cleansing him.

IT IS WELL

One of the more popular views of this parable is that the one leper is the only one who was truly and fully healed. Jesus says in verse 19: “Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well.” When you think about this in conjunction with the question Jesus asks 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?”), it almost seems like the remaining nine were not “made well” because they did not “return and give praise to God.” It’s as if, perhaps, the implication is that they were going to get sick again with leprosy.

However, this interpretation is built on a misunderstanding of the text. When Jesus says “Your faith has made you well,” the Greek literally translated reads, “Your faith saved you.” It isn’t that this Samaritan’s faith has healed him, for that would present two problems: 1. The faith of the individual is never responsible for the miracle of Jesus, because that would also mean the faithlessness of an individual would somehow limit Jesus, and Jesus is limited by no one. Not only that, but 2. It would indicate that only the Samaritan was healed, which is opposite of what Luke records in verse 14: “And as they went they were cleansed.” Either these men

² David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 691.

were all cleansed because of the divine and sovereign power of Jesus, or they weren't. Luke seems to indicate they were. The faith of the Samaritan doesn't heal him, but it is his faith that truly saves him. In other words, his faith reveals the work of God in his heart to bring him to a place of gratitude in light of what God had done, and this translated itself into the action of returning to Jesus and praising God loudly. Jesus is simply calling attention to the fact that this one man truly gets it; he is not only physically healed but spiritually saved.

What About Now?

One of the takeaways in this story is the importance of evaluating from whom our good gifts come. The nine men were excited to be healed and obediently did what Jesus told them to do: "Go and show yourselves to the priests." It's not that they did anything wrong, necessarily. But the one Samaritan stopped and thought through the implications of such a healing and reasoned that it was a work that only God could truly perform, and thus God was worthy to be praised. This moved the man into action. Whenever something good happens to us, whether it's a miracle or any kind of answer to prayer, we must remember from whom these great things come: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Ja. 1:17).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 17:11. To where was Jesus and His disciples headed? What locations did they pass between?

2. Read Luke 17:12. Where did He enter, and who approached Him? How did they approach Him?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 17:13. What did these men say to Jesus? What is unique about the title they ascribe to Him?

2. Read Luke 17:14. What did Jesus say to them in response? Why do you suppose He said this? (Hint: See above notes) Were they all cleansed?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 17:15-16. Who turned back and addressed Jesus again? What did this indicate? What was significant about this one particular man?

2. Read Luke 17:17. What does Jesus ask the Samaritan man?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 17:18. What does Jesus ask the Samaritan man?

2. Read Luke 17:19. What did He say to the man in closing? What did Jesus mean by, "Your faith has made you well?" (Hint: See above notes)

Week 62 Discussion: Gratitude

In Luke 17:11-19, Jesus heals ten lepers and only one returns with a full expression of gratitude and praise to God for this wonderful, life-changing miracle. It is this level of faith that Jesus says saves the man, not from leprosy, but from sin and death. Talk as a group about the importance of connecting gratitude to the works of God, big or small, in your life.

1. Icebreaker: What is something you are most grateful for?
2. Would you consider yourself a grateful person? Would others consider you a grateful person? Why or why not?
3. Is it easier to be grateful to God for bigger or smaller "wins" in your day to day life? Why?
4. What does gratitude ultimately reveal about a person?
5. How do ungrateful people make you feel?
6. How do gratitude and corporate worship connect? In other words, in the Sunday gathering, how important is it to worship from a place of gratitude?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus heals ten lepers; only one returns praising God for this miracle.
2. Jesus teaches that the one Samaritan man's faith actually saves him because he not only is healed, but his heart has been changed to reflect gratitude to God.