

WHERE ARE THE NINE?

Lk. 17:11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests [*Lev. 13:2 When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, a scab, or bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh like the plague of leprosy; then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests*]. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

As I was sitting down to prepare for this evening's study, news of the terrible earthquake and tsunami as it struck Japan was developing. We praise God nothing so frightening happens in our country. We also give thanks to Him that we are not prone to the many diseases other countries have, ... one such disease is leprosy.

Here, indeed, was a sight for the Lord to behold, - ten men walking towards Him (there *met him ten men*) who were lepers. You will notice the Holy Spirit particularly draws our attention to the detail that it was while Jesus was passing through the countryside, and coming into a certain little insignificant village that is not even named! It seems to be so far out into the countryside that it possibly was a haven for these kind of people, ... people with all sorts of conditions that would not have been welcome in mainstream society. And it was at the very beginning, - as Jesus was *entering* the village. It is almost as if He went there *expecting* to meet people of this ilk, - with the mission of meeting them, *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Mt. 9:13; Mk. 2:17; Lk. 5:32).

Most other people would have moved away very quickly, or crossed to the other side of the road ... but not the Saviour. ... Translate it into the spiritual realm, and consider the sight God looks upon today. He does not see merely *ten* men with spiritual 'leprosy', but countless *billions* on the road to a lost eternity. ... And yet, in the miracle of grace, He came down into this world to be *met* by those, others would avoid.

As they walked towards Him, in their hopeless defilement they *lifted up their voices, and said* The Greek word is *αἶρω*, and it means simply they made a passing request, as they would have done, almost by habit. Yes, they had heard of Jesus, so they addressed their plight to Him ... but life had been cruel to them, so they weren't overly expecting *too* much.

It's like the beggar in the street; when they see you coming they put their hand out, or ask you for money, ... more out of habit than expectation.

Yet, Jesus listened to their appeal, and He told them to go and show themselves to the priest, as the Law of Moses required, so the priest would give them a letter saying they were no longer lepers. On their way, a miracle took place because their leprosy was healed. No longer were they outcasts, but they were now as good and acceptable as anyone else!

It would have been beautiful if the Holy Spirit could have recorded that all ten lepers returned to Jesus to thank Him, but we do not read of such a development ... then or afterwards, - they simply fade out of the picture. ... Yes, healed, but they saw no need to trouble themselves to show their appreciation to Jesus. ... He had done a wonderful work of grace, but they kept walking on down the road to find the priest, and be accepted into society again ... while Jesus became forgotten. ... And that was an end to it!

Imagine ... here our nine Jews, - of the same race as Jesus, - and their tenth companion was one of the despised and detested Samaritans ... a group of people scorned by the Jews. You would not have seen them together under normal circumstances, *for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans (Jn. 4:9)*. And yet, - in the eyes of Jesus, - each of those ten men had the same great need.

Again, this describes to us how sin has no regard for race or creed, background or standing in society. Just in the same manner *all* have sinned, *all* these ten men needed Christ. Sin makes no distinction, but then, neither does the Saviour in salvation. Around the throne in Heaven are the redeemed *out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev. 5:9)*.

Take heart from that word 'every', for it teaches us Christ has died for sinners out of *every* group of people across the world. Here was a man, - rejected by his neighbours, - and yet he was the only man who returned to Jesus.

Every person today has much to thank God for, and yet, how many do?! They take from Him, but do not acknowledge His hand of generosity. They would not even think of coming into a church building, or giving Him time on His day ... but they will quite happily take from Him and walk away, and never think to give Him thanks.

THE PRAYER

It is a simple observation here that there are more touched with the goodness of God than are willing to acknowledge it. Ten people healed of such an illness, and only one returned to say “thank you”.

In fact, consider this simple picture, ... when it came to their need v.13 *they lifted up their voices*, ... they *prayed*; but when it came to their gratitude only one v.16 *fell down on his face at his feet*. Even for a leper, - in great need, - it was far easier *lifting themselves up* in front of Jesus, than *kneeling down* at His feet!

Some people would tell you it is easier speaking to older people near the end of life, - they will listen to you better, and they are more likely to accept Christ as Saviour. No, that is not true. The heart is hard, no matter what age ... and even though death is becoming more of a reality, their hearts are as unrepentant and as cold towards the Gospel. It does not matter what age a person is, or in what circumstances ... except for the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit, they will not cry out to God to be saved!

No matter how far this world gets people down, it always proves harder to get them even further down ... *down* to the feet of Jesus. No matter how life has dealt with them, and no matter how you try to explain the grace of God ... they will not bow the knee. It takes the work of Sovereign and Free Grace, otherwise they will *never* acknowledge Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord!

THE PRAISE

Take another look at them. Listen to their call to Jesus, *Jesus, Master [evpistathj]*, *have mercy on us*. It is not the word for ‘Master’ normally used ... kurio ” or rabbei would be more often used, - they are actually seven Greek words translated ‘Master’ in our New Testaments. This particular word, though, is also used seven times in the New Testament (Lk. 5:5; 8:24,45; 9:33,49).

This word *evpistathj*” means ‘a commander, a chief, a ruler’ ... and that was how these people called to Jesus. Here, in this village, they saw Jesus, - fully fit and having no disease, - and they called out to Him using this term of authority. Doesn’t it remind you how ordinary people call out to Him in their need? They don’t think of Him any other time but, when everything has failed them, *then* they come to God, - He is their last ‘port of call’. It is also often the way that if He does not answer their prayers according to their wishes, they ‘turn on Him’ ... accusing Him of not caring, or even that He does not exist.

Yes, people ask you to pray for them, and when the Lord does heal them and restore them, those same people very rarely give a moment's thought to thank Him for His goodness. Sadly, even as believers, sometimes we can take for granted what God does for us. Yes, we *pray* ... and when the Lord graciously answers our prayers ... do we *praise*? We can look at these nine lepers and judge them for not returning to acknowledge what Jesus did for them ... but do we *praise* as well as *pray*?

Where would any of us be today but for the faithfulness of God? But for His grace and mercy we would have no interest in Him. These men were beggars, - their leprosy, despite what they had been previously, - had made them beggars. Among some of the vagrants in London I used to work with, I remember some who previously had been in professional careers, but the alcohol had taken them over, robbed them of their families and their dignity, and they were like these men Jesus met ... no-one decent would have had anything to do with them ... and they kept to their own community!

But these were real people I worked with and loved ... and these were real people also Jesus met and loved. They had a need only He could meet. It was more than simply healing them of leprosy ... and only one man went further and had His soul cleansed too.

... And this man prayed, - along with the others, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us* ... but He also *turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks.*

It is often the case, - like these nine men, - many find it far easier to obey ritual than the teachings of the Lord, as we find them in God's Word. They find it far easier going to a priest, or a minister, or a church. It is far easier to perform an outward religious expression ... but it was not religion that healed these men, but the Saviour. It is easy to be satisfied by religion, - attending church every now and again, putting up to be religious ... but religion does not save, only the relationship with Christ saves! This man embraced this relationship when he fell at the feet of Jesus.

I wonder what verse fourteen means. It could have at least two possibilities. It could mean that after calling out to Jesus they walked on down the road not really expecting anything to happen, - they 'tried' Jesus, and they just kept on going the same direction they were travelling when first they met Him. It could also mean, yes, they believed, and they were on their way to their priest. Either way, their faith was all about their leprosy. It was about something they expected Jesus to do for them, without them having to give anything back.

It is again like when someone in the hospital asks you to pray for their illness. It is just their illness they want you to pray for, - they don't see any *spiritual* necessity. But Jesus had more for them than simply being healed of physical illness, He also had spiritual healing available to them.

But, once again, we can turn this in on ourselves. Spurgeon said, "We believe for Heaven and eternity, and yet do not magnify the Lord as we should for earth and time". These lepers could not see past their own immediate need of leprosy, - they wanted the benefits from Christ, they would have been looking at themselves, - examining their skin, - and Jesus was only a means to an end.

I sometimes think that is how many use Him in the Church. We want a big church, and God will help us achieve what we want ... He is there to meet *our* needs, rather than us being concerned with what He would want, - His will, "*My* will be done, rather than *Thy* will be done". It certainly reveals something of a person's religion when they set out a list of what they want, when what they want has not been the product of coming before the Lord in prayer.

This man knew he was healed, - and so were the rest of them, - and the very first steps in his new life brought him to the feet of Jesus! That is true salvation. True salvation overcomes from head to toe, and from the inside out. Yes, this man *prayed*, - along with the rest of them, - but he *praised* alone.

THE PERSON

The ten lepers had each other for company. That morning was just like every other morning for them ... until they met Jesus. It did not matter one of them was a Samaritan because, basically, they were all outcasts from society. Each morning they started another day to go nowhere together. But on this particular day, when they were all going nowhere together ... look and see what Jesus did for this man.

Previously, this man had been standing afar off from Jesus (v.12), but now we find him at the feet of Jesus (v.16), - no longer at a distance! Here he was heading towards a lost eternity with those other lepers, - it reminds us that you can sin in company and you can go to Hell in company, but when you come for salvation to Christ, you must come to Him personally and alone.

And you notice too that this man had to leave the company of the other nine, - instead of going to the ordinary priest like the rest of them, he came to the *High Priest*! He did not 'get religion', he got the relationship! ... Why would he have had any desire to be with them anymore?!

That man went to the priest eventually, - because he had to receive a certificate confirming his leprosy had gone, - but he came to Jesus first. You remember when you were saved. You can remember the new-found joy in your soul. You wanted to attend the meetings, read God's Word, speak about your faith, and find out more about Jesus. This man wanted to find out more about Him too, and he came and fell at His feet! As soon as he discovered his skin was perfect, he did not linger or wait ... he rushed to the Saviour.

When you linger or wait ... sometimes you tend to put it off. Some people know their need of the Saviour, - they know what they should do, and how to do it, - but they linger and wait, until it escapes them!

This man returned to Jesus when he discovered what Jesus had done, and he fell at His feet, - in front of the whole village. Only healed, but he was in the dust again worshipping Jesus and glorifying God! The man was back with Jesus as quickly as the new-found strength in his legs would take him!

No dilly-dallying, no going to do something else first. ... You hear about people who 'make a decision for Christ', but you don't see them at the meetings on a Sunday, or the prayer meetings, and you don't seem them with their Bible and asking questions about it ... how can they be saved if they are not like this man, and their priority is somewhere else other than with Jesus!

If the Lord Jesus does not come first when you make your profession of faith, well I fear it has not been built upon the Rock! When He saves you, you will leave your old company and your old way of life, and you will come immediately to Him and take on His new life.

You will also notice he made no secret of what he was going to do, *when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God*. He could have praised God in a quiet way, ... after going to see the priest, he could privately have gone somewhere away from the rest, and thanked God ... and not made 'too big a thing of it'! But when the Lord changes your life, how can you *not* make 'too big a thing of it'! "For all the Lord hath done for me, I never will cease to praise Him!"

If this man had not have returned to Jesus, there would not have been any difference between him and the other nine! Imagine being covered in leprosy one moment, and healed of it the next! ...

Imagine being a sinner on your way to Hell one moment, and saved and heading towards heaven the next!! ... Surely we have far more to praise the Lord about than any healed leper!

And look at this man again, - He came closer to the Lord than before, when he *fell down on his face at his feet*. Previously he was in the company of his leper-friends, and now he is with Jesus! I am nobody, Lord, I don't even have a name, and I was with other men who did not have a name ... we were simply known as lepers and outcasts. Previously he had lifted up his voice with the others (v.13), ... but now, he was healed, restored and changed ... and at the feet of Jesus, - a new creature in Christ, the old things having passed away, and all things becoming new (II Cor.5:17)!

Not only was he there in humility, but he was there also in worship. He had separated from the nine, - they had gone their way, he had gone his. In fact, do you notice he had nothing bad to say about the other nine, when Jesus asked him, *where are the nine?* He could have answered, "Och, them!" ... and he could have 'bad-mouthed' them, but no, he made no answer for he was full of gratitude to the Saviour for what the Lord had done for Him ... and that was all that filled his mind.

The priest to whom the other nine went had not healed them, ... it was not anything spectacular the priest had done for them ... They owed their debt to the Saviour, and only one man returned to give Him worship. It is good the other nine were healed, but it was also a bit of 'a damp squib' because Christ had far more for them ... but only one man returned to receive it.

This is where gratitude to the Lord leads you, - it leads you to His feet. You want to be with Him for you want to learn more about Him, and you want to become like Him. At first, this man, - along with the rest of them, - called Him *Jesus, Master* ... but when he was healed He recognised Him as *God* (v.15). He commended the Lord! Yes, *where are the nine?* ... but implicit in the Lord's question was His commendation of this man.

In some ways, - from an ordinary perspective, on the outside, - this man was further from God because he was a Samaritan. He belonged to the ten tribes that had smeared their relationship with God centuries earlier ... and yet, the wonder of everlasting grace ... this man who was considered the least by fellow-men enjoyed the most from this meeting with Christ.

CONCLUSION

How do we conclude our study? Surely its pinnacle is Christ Jesus meeting with sinners. Like the sheep that was lost, it was the Shepherd Who went seeking. The lepers would never have left their village and its environs, because that was their lot in life ... *but Jesus came to them!*

Oh, what a Saviour that He died for me! From condemnation He hath made me free; "He that believeth on the Son," said He, "Hath everlasting life." ... Though poor and needy, I can trust my Lord; Though weak and sinful I believe His Word; O glad message! Every child of God "Hath everlasting life." ... And how can we have everlasting life? Only through the Saviour Who died for us at Calvary.

This is yet another account of how Jesus meets the sinner, - He went to where they were, because He knew they would never come to Him. If you are not saved, as far as Christ is concerned, you have the same problem as those lepers, - all ten of them. There is nothing about you that would warrant you spending eternity in Heaven. Church won't do it for you, - going to a priest and receiving a letter of commendation won't do it ... but coming and, - by faith, - falling at the feet of Jesus in repentance *will*.

It is a beautiful story of Christ's saving power, but the Lord's purpose in drawing our attention to it is so that you would see your need of salvation and cry out to Jesus also, and come and fall at His feet crying out for Him to save you.

If you are not saved, I trust the Holy Spirit will apply this simple illustration to your heart, in electing grace and saving power, for the glory of God, through our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.