

## 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. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them [*εἷς δὲ ἐξ*], 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.

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 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, outcasts ... people not welcome in the towns. And it was at the very beginning, - as Jesus was *entering* the village. It is almost as if He went there to meet people of this ilk, - 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 avoided this area, but not the Saviour. ... As they walked towards Him, they *lifted up their voices, and said ....* The Greek word is *ἀίρω*, and it means simply they made a passing request, as they would have done, almost by habit to just about anyone who did not belong to their community, so they addressed Him, *Master, have mercy on us ...* But nobody decent ever paid them any attention, so they weren't overly expecting a response. It's like the beggar in the street who when they see you coming they put their hand out ... 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 [*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*]. On their way, a miracle took place and their leprosy was healed. No longer outcasts, but they were now as good and acceptable as anyone else!

It would have been beautiful if all ten lepers returned to thank Jesus, but there is no mention of it ... then or afterwards, - they simply fade out of the picture. ... Yes, they got what they wanted from Jesus, - healed, - but they saw no need to trouble themselves to show their appreciation to Him. ... And so they kept

walking on down the road to find the priest, and be accepted into society again ... while they forgot all about Jesus. ... It is simply the way of the world!

So, here our nine Jews, - of the same race as Jesus, - and their tenth companion was a Samaritan ... 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. He saw no difference.

Again, this describes how God views each one of us. We started out being all the same to Him because all have sinned. Sin has no regard for race or creed, background or any particular group or class. It didn't matter where these men had come from for *all* have sinned, and *all* these ten men needed Christ. Sin makes no distinction, but then, neither does the Saviour in salvation for around the throne in Heaven are the redeemed *out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation* (Rev. 5:9). ... And here was a Samaritan outcast, - a leper, rejected by his neighbours, - and yet he was the only man who returned to acknowledge what Jesus had done for him.

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. ... Let's look closer ...

### **THE PRAYER**

It is a simple observation here there are more touched with the goodness of God than were willing to acknowledge it. Ten people healed, but only said, "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 ... that is, *down* to the feet of Jesus. ... 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* [ἐπιστάτης], *have mercy on us*. It is not the regular word for 'Master' normally used ... κυριο" or ραββει was much more common, - there 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 ἐπιστάτης" means 'a commander, a chief, a ruler' ... and that was how these people addressed Jesus. Here, in this village, He was very distinctive for He was fully fit and having no disease, - and they called out to Him using this term of distant 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 else has failed them, *then* they come to God as their last 'port of call'.

Yes, people ask you to pray for them, and when the Lord does heal them and restore them, the same people very rarely give a moment's thought to thank Him for what He has done for them. 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. Despite what they had been previously, - their leprosy had turned them into beggars. Leprosy had robbed them of their families and their dignity, and no-one decent would have had anything to do with them ... so they kept to their own kind.

But these were real people Jesus loved. They had a need only He could answer. It was more than simply a problem of their 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* ... - he had said the same prayer as the other nine, but God was working in his life for his prayer was accompanied by faith which was further accompanied by an active response because he stopped, and he

turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks. ... God's grace brought him back to Jesus!

It is often the case, - like these nine men, - many find it easier to obey ritual than to obey God's Word. They find it easier going to a priest, or a minister, or a church to perform an outward religious expression ... but it was not religion that healed these men, but the Saviour. Whereas the other nine followed their religion, this Samaritan followed Jesus, and fell at His feet in gratitude.

Look closely at the verse, **14** And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. It could have at least two meanings. 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 ... as if they were expecting nothing to happen. It could also mean, yes, they believed, and they were on their way to the 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* need to become right with God. 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. These lepers could not see past their own immediate need of leprosy, - they wanted the benefits from Christ, and that was all. They would have been looking at themselves, - examining their skin ... seeing if 'it' had worked ... and Jesus was only a means to an end, "*My* will be done, rather than *Thy* will be done".

And so, this man knew he was healed, - and, possibly/probably, so were the rest of them, - and the very first steps in this man's new life, - it was like he was born again, starting all over, - ... his first steps brought him to the feet of Jesus! That is true salvation. Real 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, - more of the 'same old, same old' ... until they met Jesus. It did not matter one of them was a Samaritan because, basically, they were all social outcasts. Each morning they started their day going nowhere together, and at the end of the day, that is as far as they got, - *nowhere!* 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 (v.12), but now we find him at the feet of the Saviour (v.16), - he had come to Jesus! Here he was heading away 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 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! ...

That man went to the priest eventually, - that was the Jewish law, because he had to receive a certificate confirming his leprosy had gone, - but he came to Jesus first. This man wanted to find out more about Jesus, 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. That is how serious you know this man is about Jesus, - he wanted to be in His company. ... That is one of the first signs of genuine believer, - they want to be where Jesus is, and where His people are. They want Christian fellowship.

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 *immediately* 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 in the company of Jesus, or withy other Christians ... how can they be saved if they are not like this man, and their priority is somewhere else other than with Jesus!

But when the Lord Jesus saves you, it is *His* company you want, - it takes priority over all others ... and that is how it was with this leper. You lay aside your old company and your old way of life, and you come and take on His way of living. ... You will be like this leper, - Jesus will be your priority!

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 he made no secret of what he was going to do ... 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!! ... Imagine, saying nothing about it! Imagine keeping it to yourself! ... It would make no sense!! ... Surely, we have 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 creation, 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 in worship. He had separated from the nine, - they had gone their way, he had gone his. In fact, do you notice too how 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 He had done for him ... and that was all that filled his mind. It was simply about the Saviour and him.

The priest to whom the other nine went had not healed them, ... it was not anything the priest had done for them ... They owed their debt to the Saviour, and only one man returned to thank Him. 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 ... and only one man returned to receive it.

This is where gratitude to the Lord leads you, - it leads you to stay with Him. You want to be with Him for you want to learn about Him, and from 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* (15 *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God*). The outcast commended the Lord! Yes, *where are the nine?* ... but implicit in the Lord's question was His acceptance 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 God's grace was that 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 Jesus meeting with sinners. Like the sheep that was lost, it was the Shepherd Who went seeking. The lepers would never have left their community, because that was their lot in life ... *but Jesus came to them!* ... He came to the place others avoided. He went to where He would meet sinners, 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 to indicate you warrant spending eternity in Heaven with Jesus. None of us deserves to go to Heaven, but Jesus came to make it possible when the seeking Saviour falls at His feet in repentance.

If you are not saved, consider what we have studied, and I trust the Holy Spirit will show you how you are as precious to God as this leper was ... and that you will come and believe in Him as your Saviour and as your Lord. Amen.