



“At His Feet” – Luke 17:11-19

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Luke 17:11 *Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 So when He saw them,*

He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, 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 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 "Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Truly how little we know ourselves! How seldom do we understand our true state, not to mention the condition of the whole of humanity. These ten men in our story however, *certainly in rare form*, understood without question. They “got it.” They were physically and spiritually “unclean.” They were “dead men walking.”

William Barclay (The Daily Study Bible: Matthew [Westminster Press], 1:295) describes the disease of leprosy as follows: *It might begin with little nodules which go on to ulcerate. The ulcers develop a foul discharge; the eyebrows fall out; the eyes become staring; the vocal chords become ulcerated, and the voice becomes hoarse, and the breath wheezes. The hands and feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of that kind of leprosy is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma and ultimately death.*

Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body; the nerve trunks are affected; the muscles waste away; the tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follows ulceration of the hands and feet. Then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes, until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from twenty to thirty years. It is a kind of terrible progressive death in which a man dies by inches.

We all have seen it. Either in real life or in a movie or on TV. The moment when the man is told that he is “terminal”...that he has only months to live. The reaction is dramatic and immediate. There are the “5 stages of grief”...*denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance*. There is great overwhelming emotion throughout the whole process. Myself, I have always thought such reaction was a strange thing. Seldom if ever do we open our eyes in the morning and become overwhelmed with emotion that we “are alive.” What does such tell us? It tells us that we see life not as a gift but rather as a right: the manifest of self-entitlement at its greatest.

These men were “dead.” Oh sure, they were still breathing and walking around. But death was so sure in its coming, that there was no hiding from it...no avoiding its impact. Because they were essential dead, the lives they **did** live was no doubt dramatically different than yours and mine. There was no large credit purchases, no 40 year mortgages.

What they owned, how they spent their time, and what their relationships with others was like...all would be dramatically altered by their very terminal prognosis. They would indeed...*if the pain they endured was not too bad*, rejoice each morning when their feet hit the ground one more time. What they **could** do, they would do with immediacy, because there was no time to loose. There was no promise of tomorrow. No guarantee of a second chance to “do it another day.” Every day was their “last day.”

Such a lifestyle would be so incredibly foreign to many of us. For the truth is that we totally live our lives in light of a tomorrow. We put things off, drag our feet, postpone and delay. We will do it “someday,” commit later, and fix it in the future. There is “plenty of time” and always another day. But not for these 10 men. Not only was their no such guarantee, but I would imagine there would not even be a belief of such. Whatever they needed to do, they had today to do it. The bible version “The Voice” renders Ecclesiastes 1:2 as follows: “*Life is fleeting, like a passing mist. It is like trying to catch hold of a breath; all vanishes like a vapor; everything is a great vanity.*”

Luke 9:23 “*And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’”*

Galatians 2:20 “*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*”

How alien and distant is such concepts to many of us! We often struggle and squirm with elementary concepts like service, tithing, church participation levels and church membership. I wonder if we understand that such battles are both trivial and light-years away from the level of the calls of Luke 9:23 and Galatians 2:20! Not to mention light years from the world of these ten men. Such issues are not even ‘in the building’ when put up to the light of the call by Christ in Luke 9:23 or Paul in Galatians 2:20. But when life and tomorrow are considered a right and a certainty, we can afford to lose ourselves in the trivial, the minor, and the selfish!

These ten men “stood afar off” because they knew what they were: *they were “unclean.”* Such a concept stemmed not only from the possibility of contagion and spread of leprosy, but equally there was the idea that such folks were *spiritually* and *ceremonially* unclean as well. It was the cultural and *philosophical* idea behind their sickness, in that they were “dirty” and unworthy of being with others who did not suffer from such public and overt issues.

The average Jew understood *at least on the elemental level*, that God was holy and pure, and that He would not...He *could* not, be in the presence of such imperfection. But that is where the issue stopped for such “average man.” For if it hadn’t, perhaps it would have occurred to him that he himself...*however good and religious he was*, was still not perfect and therefore was not “holy.” And if he was not, then how would HE approach the living God? But the average guy believed himself to be fundamentally different than these 10 men and that *in comparison to they*, he was as white and pure as the driven snow!

These men in the text hung back and raised their voices to all who would pass... “*Unclean! Unclean!*” Their shouts were prescribed by law and failure to do so would cost them their lives, for they would be quickly stoned to death if they failed to announce their presence. In their state of existence, there was a “clarity.” They knew they were not clean and that God was. There was no denying it or hiding from such a fact. Even without a mirror, such a fact was evident. Again, that clarity had deep and profound effect upon their very existence.

How different is **our** approach to God and our fellowman. Ours is far more often self-righteous and presumptive. When we fail to get what we want or feel we were not treated well enough or disrespected in some

manner, we lash out. We strut up to the throne of God with incredulous words of anger and questioning. We “un-friend” our relationships, gossip about them on social media, and avoid eye-contact with “ex-friends” at the farmers market. Because “we have rights” you know! Ummm, **not if you’re dead!** Dead men have no rights. But we **deserve** “fill-in-the-blank.” Again...not if you’re a leper, and it doesn’t matter what you think you deserve if you are dead!

These men called out to Jesus and called Him “master.” The term they used means “chief and commander.” They understood who they were dealing with. Do we? Does OUR approach to Jesus speak the same? It was clearly understood in that day that leprosy was terminal. There was no cure. It was not until the 1940’s that an effective treatment was found for leprosy. Yet despite that fact, there was inexplicably a rather detailed ritual found deep in the Law of Moses to be followed when someone was so “healed”. There were steps to follow to confirm the healing and instructions of what to do to reenter society. This instruction is found in Leviticus 14. Now why would such a detailed instruction be recorded if leprosy was incurable? No doubt because God knew the Son was coming! The Messiah who would have power over sin, death, and disease! For what was “*impossible for man, is possible with God!*” (Matt 19:26)

The similarity between sin and leprosy is incredible and stark. Both were debilitating and terminal. Both places a person “outside” the camp *so to speak*, away from God and the people of God. Both slowly causes numbness and eventual lack of feeling. Both cause an ugliness and takes away from the fullness and joy of life. In the day that Moses recorded those worlds in Leviticus as to the healing of a leper, both leprosy *and sin* meant death. A “walking death” and eventual physical death. But yet provision was made for both, because Jesus was coming...

Jesus, following those Old Testament instructions, sends them off to the priest to be declared clean. Notice that Jesus gave them **instructions**. It was their obedience to His instruction that would be the exercise of their faith! Of course, we too, are expected to manifest **our** healing with the exercise of obedience. THIS is faith! There is to be a “testimony” in life deeds and words of the transformation what has occurred within us. Faith is moving in belief of what He has said is fact, even though we cannot immediately see it.

Yet while all ten believed and recognized their healing, only one recognized the magnitude of who and what was the healer. This one man came back to Jesus and fell to his feet in thanks and acknowledgment! He glorified Jesus before everyone. Moreover, this man was a Samaritan. That meant he not only had the stigma of leprosy, but he was a social throw-away before he had even acquired that disease. His new life was waiting out there, and the 9 were quick to go get it. But this man, he was not in such a hurry. He had been made whole and he knew where he needed to be. All the rest of life and living would wait...all paled in importance. Right now...right here, he needed to be at the feet of Jesus.

As we have recently covered, there were so many folks, just as there are now, that looked to God for the wrong reasons. Legitimate in their need, yet so small in their view. CS Lewis once was quoted saying “*It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*” Some wanted the food He created, some wanted healing of body or mind, some were looking for a political or even military rescue from an oppressive Roman government. Their fundamental understanding of the person and ministry of the Son of God was flawed, small, and selfish.

Both then and now, man’s dwelling in the kingdom was so often about me and what I get out of it. But such a grasp is flawed at its core. For the “kingdom” that we are to seek is not simply some place we are to dwell in,

but rather something that is to dwell in us. We are, in effect, to serve as living, breathing embassies, sovereign soil of another country with a king that does not come up for a vote every four years! We exist in this earthly country of America, but like an embassy, we are a piece of God's kingdom existing in its midst. It's not about *us* but rather all about our King.

This one Samaritan man with the new life understood. One can only wonder what life now held for the other nine. Perhaps now they would simply live like all the rest of humanity. They too would fall prey to the "plenty of time" syndrome and the "where's mine" mentality? Perhaps they fell into the masses to become indistinguishable from the endless religious multitude...acknowledging yes, that Jesus had healed them, but for *what?*

Jesus said, "*Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?*" Perhaps we would answer... "*well Jesus, they went to the priest as you instructed...they were obeying your instructions.*" That's true, but is that it? Is that all you got? Is there nothing more than doing the right stuff and not doing bad stuff? Is that a Christian then? Or is there something more...something missing from our relationship with Him. Something that this one man had found?

For many of us, worship is something we do before the message on Wednesdays and Sundays at church. But there is the rare individual that understands what the multitude never will: and that is that our place is at His feet. The one who understands that worship is more than singing songs, but rather it is to encompass the whole of how we live the redeemed life.

There is a booklet written by a man by the name of Jerry Benjamin called "***What is the first indication of turning away from God?***" In his booklet (and in scripture) he says that "grumbling, murmuring, or complaining is a sign of not trusting in God and is a first indication of turning away from the promises of Christ." It's a sign that one has forgotten what Christ has done. In 2 Peter 1:9, the apostle Peter warns us of the dangers of being one who is "...*shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.*"

Sadly, I have known some folks who were rescued from truly the depths of sin and an avalanche of consequences. I am talking about those particular people who were in *really* deep, and were redeemed out of desperate situations. They were "lepers" in every way, and were living outside of not just the church but outside of society. Jesus found them and picked them up from the sewer. And for a time there was thankfulness and joy in their redemption.

But as incredible as it might seem, they eventually morphed into something very different, and became blindingly prideful and self-centered. They lusted after position and status, and desired more things of the world than they had been so graciously given. They became self-righteous and overtly judgmental against everyone besides themselves. In the end, they moved on...forgetting, it seemed, what God and His church had done and been a part of concerning their redemption.

Clearly they had forgotten that day when Jesus inexplicably healed them. Often they went on being religious and pious elsewhere, but remained bitter, hateful and elitist. I cannot help but wonder aloud, *how did such a thing happen?* The answer is they ceased to find themselves at the feet of Jesus. They ceased living in a state of worship.

Think for moment about your lives. Do you regularly and consistently find yourself in awe of Him and His work? Do you marvel at His grace and His power? Do you acknowledge your unworthiness and wonder at His love. Or are you simply a religious person who knows nothing about living at the feet of Jesus?