

Lessons From The Leper

Reading: Luke 17:11-19

- A. He was beyond a nobody in his world. He was a man no one wanted to know. He was a leper.
 - 1. Leprosy was an awful disease. It began simply enough – with a small patch of discolored skin, most likely on a person's face. But it would spread, covering the body with crusty scales and sores. Then it would eat into the tissue, destroying the internal organs. It would slowly consume the entire body.
 - 2. Those afflicted with the disease were forced to live in isolation outside the community. Verse 12 mentions that these lepers stood at a distance to meet Jesus. Wherever they went they were forced to call out, "unclean, unclean" to warn others of their presence. Worst of all, at this time there was no cure for this dreadful disease. Perhaps this is why some refer to the leper as the living dead.
- B. This background only helps us appreciate the amazing thing that Jesus does for this man.
 - 1. He literally saves his life by ridding his body of this terrible disease. It was an amazing miracle which served to demonstrate Jesus' power over every human affliction, even those which seemed incurable. It may be that this miracle foreshadowed the cure that Jesus would provide for a far worse disease – sin!
 - 2. But there is another lesson here. This nameless leper may have been a nobody at that time, but his story has been teaching men for centuries a powerful lesson about gratitude.
 - 3. At this season, when Americans pause to be grateful, I want us to consider his story once more.
 - 4. There are three things this leper saw...that every man needs to see.

He saw that he was blessed.

- A. Now maybe you're thinking this point is so obvious it hardly needs to be mentioned. Perhaps it is.
 - 1. But appreciate that only one thing had changed about this man's life. The disease that afflicted his body has now been removed.
 - 2. It's not like he had won the lottery. He wasn't suddenly made a millionaire. He wasn't given vast land holdings that he can now cultivate. He wasn't given a big, fancy house. He wasn't even given a new change of clothes to wear. Other than being cured, his situation really had not changed. Because he was a leper, it is likely that his situation in life was not very good.
 - 3. But all of this misses the point, doesn't it? This man was dying, his body literally being consumed by this terrible disease. But now he has been healed. If he never received another blessing, if he lived a meager existence for the rest of his days, we would still say that his heart should be filled with gratitude for the amazing thing Jesus had done for him.
 - 4. In fact, imagine if this man had come to Jesus and demanded more. What if he had said, "I appreciate the healing, but I have other needs (a house, a job, money, clothes, a donkey)...what about those, Lord?" What lesson would this story teach? We would cite it as a display of unimaginable ingratitude. We would say that this man needed to recognize that he was blessed! Fortunately, he did.
- B. Here's the question: Do we see what the leper saw, that we are blessed?
 - 1. Leprosy is an awful disease, but it does not begin to compare with the tragedy of sin.
 - a. Leprosy afflicts the body, but sin afflicts the body and the soul.
 - b. Leprosy cut a man off from society, but sin separates a man from his God (Isaiah 59:1-2).
 - c. Leprosy ultimately led to death, but sin leads to spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Sin is the greatest human tragedy.
 - 2. But here's the good news: Jesus provides a cure (Romans 5:8-10). We have been delivered from a disease far worse than leprosy. We have been saved from sin and its dreadful consequences (separation from God, an eternity in hell).
 - 3. If this is what we believe, then how much more should we live out our days overflowing with gratitude for the great gift God has given to us?
 - a. It should empower us to be thankful, even if life's circumstances are not so great. Whatever life throws my way – good or bad...I'm at peace with God. I've got His word to guide me. I live with the hope of heaven. I am blessed beyond measure.
 - b. It should make us ashamed of our complaining. Think about it: God has done this great thing. But rather than being filled with gratitude, we allow ourselves to complain about the details (God should give me more money, better health, a bigger house, a better car...I'm so deprived). We should be ashamed.
 - c. But more important, we need to see what this recovering leper saw – we are blessed.

He saw Jesus as the source of his blessing.

- A. Notice what he does when he discovers that he is healed (vs. 14-16).
 - 1. He did not say, "Wow, I'm cleansed. How did that happen?"
 - 2. He certainly could not say, "Look at the amazing way I cured by own body."
 - 3. He understood that Jesus was the source of this blessing.
 - 4. Now that seems obvious, doesn't it? Of course he should see Jesus as the One who provided this blessing.

- B. Here's the question: Do we see that? Do we see Jesus as the source of our blessings?
1. Sometimes we don't. We prefer to think of ourselves as self-made. Our accomplishments and rewards are the product of our intelligence, hard work and sacrifice. As we fill up with pride over our success, there is a corresponding drop in our gratitude toward God.
 - a. Lance Armstrong has been successful in two significant ways. First, he won the Tour de France seven consecutive times, more than any other cyclist. Second, he won a personal battle with cancer. But does he recognize God as the source of his blessings? Absolutely not! He credits the doctors and chemotherapy for his cancer cure. His cycling success is about his hard work and skill.
 - b. Think of the arrogance. He's working with a body designed by God. He exercises and develops a muscle system that God put together. He forms his exercise routines and plans his racing strategy using the mind God created. He rides a bike designed by the finest minds – again, minds God designed with the ability to learn and create. He's made a few small tweaks to the amazing things God designed and created...and he thinks he has something to brag about? What foolish arrogance.
 2. After watching the Texas Longhorns beat up on Kansas last Saturday, I listened to their quarterback, Colt McCoy, being interviewed.
 - a. When asked about his performance, the very first thing he said was that he wanted to give God the glory for blessing him with the ability to play that game. This is a guy who has it right.
 - b. He sees what the lame man saw – what we all need to see – that God is the source of our blessings (James 1:17). Whatever we may accomplish, we accomplish with His stuff. He has done great things. The little things we do are nothing in comparison.
 3. We need to see that our blessings come from God. When we do, this will cause us to see something else the leper saw...

He saw the need to express his gratitude.

- A. This probably does not adequately describe the scene before us.
1. What we have is a man so filled with gratitude for this great blessing that he is driven back to Jesus to pour it out (vs. 15-16).
 2. Two things impress me about what he does.
 - a. First, impressed that he goes back to thank Jesus before he does anything else. Certainly there would have been other things he would want to do urgently, perhaps see family or friends and tell them what has happened. But before he does any of that, he is driven back to Jesus.
 - b. Second, I'm impressed with his passion. It does not appear that he slowly walks back to Jesus and says, "Oh, by the way, thanks for healing me." As soon as he realizes that he has been healed, he shouts for joy. He turns and runs back to find Jesus. He falls at his feet, pouring out expression of his gratitude and praise.
- B. Here's the question: Do we see the need to express our gratitude in this same way?
1. Think about what has been done for us. Jesus has forgiven our sins, made peace between us and our God, and given us the hope of heaven when this life is over. How should we express our gratitude for such an amazing gift?
 2. Such expressions should be a priority. I should thank God every day in my prayers (Philippians 4:6). It should draw me to gatherings like this where I can pour out the gratitude that fills my heart.
 3. I should be passionate about expressing my gratitude. For people so blessed, it should not be possible to group them all together and mindlessly mutter the words, "thank you for my many blessings." I need to do what the old song songs, "name them one by one," relishing the value of each one. I should be passionate about my worship which often involves expressions of our thanks. I should not be able to mindless mutter through songs like *Praise The Lord, Jesus, Name Above All Names, or Rock Of My Heart*. I wonderful if our worship becomes a lifeless ritual because we have forgotten, because we are no longer filled up with gratitude for the great things God has done.
 4. We need to see what this leper saw, the need to express gratitude to God.

Conclusion: We can learn a lot from this leper...

- A. We can also learn a lot from the other nine. Two other things stand out in this story. First, we notice that nine of those who were healed did not even bother to come back and thank Jesus. Second, this mattered to Him (17-19). After all God has done, it breaks His heart when men are filled with ingratitude and treat His blessings lightly. So the question confronts us: into which class do we fall? Are we with this one man who was grateful, or numbered among the nine?
- B. Keep in mind that the worst expression of our ingratitude is when we reject God's offer of cleanings and forgiveness. After all He has done to provide for our salvation, what an insult to walk away from His offer of grace and forgiveness. Don't make that mistake today. Don't number yourself among the nine. Come to Jesus and accept the spiritual healing that He offers.

- David A. Banning