

Faith That Makes You Whole

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[0 : 00] Well, take your Bibles then, if you have one with you, and I hope you do, and turn to Luke chapter 17.

Luke chapter 17, we've come now to one of those familiar Bible texts, one that is, by the way, unique to the Gospel of Luke. You'll not find this particular story in any of the other Gospels. And it is the story of the ten lepers, a very familiar story, so hopefully you have your Bibles open to it, Luke 17. And I'm going to read verses 11 through 19.

11 through 19. And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned. And with a loud voice glorified God and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks.

[1 : 38] And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?

This foreigner? And he said to him, arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well. So it's a familiar story, isn't it?

And there are, I would say to you, at least two ways to approach the teaching or preaching of this story. And, of course, one way would be to focus on the subject of thanksgiving, right?

And you've heard that approach before. In fact, maybe, perhaps, as I read the story, that was the first thing you thought of. That the idea here is, the subject is, thanksgiving.

And so we could approach it that way, highlighting, first of all, the appalling ingratitude of the nine men who were healed and did not go back and give thanks. And then, of course, highlighting the genuine, heartfelt, overt gratitude of the one leper who was also healed but did return and give thanks to the Lord.

[2 : 56] So we could use that approach this morning. In fact, I have used that approach before. I think it was a couple of years ago around Thanksgiving. I preached from this very text and the subject was Thanksgiving.

And I'm sure you remember that, don't you? Right? Amen? Well, that was pretty telling. All right. So I guess I could have just used that approach this time, preached the same sermon you would not have even known.

Right? There's a second way to approach this story. And that is to focus on the subject of faith. The subject of faith.

That's part of the story. A big part of it. And I'm talking about genuine faith. Genuine faith. Genuine faith. A faith through which God gives salvation.

Grants salvation. And he did that here in this story. As we shall see as we look at that. And so we're talking about a genuine saving faith.

[3 : 59] Faith. Of which a thankful heart is evidence. You see. And so maybe, perhaps, if we're just really getting strict about it.

This story is more about faith than it is about thanksgiving. The subject is faith. Saving faith. Faith. And a leper who evidenced that saving faith through his thankfulness.

His thankfulness to the Lord. All right. So the story is not just about the healing of a thankful leper. The story is also about the salvation of a believing leper. A believing leper.

And so while there is a lesson here on thanksgiving. There is a lesson on faith. A faith that makes you whole. All right.

So let's see this from the story. And I just want to go ahead and just get right into it. Enough introduction. In fact, really, my first point is somewhat introduction. That is, we're going to be focusing on Luke's introduction to the story.

[5 : 02] And it's important how he introduces this. And then as he gets on into the story and describes these ten lepers.

All right. So here's the first point that I want us to see here. And that is, this story reveals the condition of the soul. That's number one.

This story is very graphic about that, as a matter of fact. As it reveals the condition of the soul. And I would even add to that the universal condition of the human soul.

The condition of the soul. And I want you to notice very carefully how Luke kind of introduces the story. How he begins the story. Verse 11. Because every part of the story is important, okay? See, listen. God's word is inspired of the Holy Spirit down to the very words. And so there are no wasted words in the word of God. And so we can look at how Luke introduces this story and discover some very important things.

[6 : 06] So verse 11, this is how he begins. Now it happened. What happened? This incident with the ten lepers. It happened as he went to Jerusalem.

All right. So Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, he is about to make his final visit in Jerusalem during his life here on planet Earth.

Because he's on his way to the cross. And so on his way to Jerusalem, as we kind of go on with the story, he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

Now, a more literal translation would be he was passing through between Samaria and Galilee.

Now that's very awkward, isn't it? In fact, that's kind of the older version of the New American Standard. I think they may have cleaned that up just a little bit. I'm not sure. I didn't go back and look at the newest. But listen, that's kind of odd.

[7 : 05] He is passing through between. I mean, how do you do that? How do you pass through between? But see, the translator here is just trying to bring out the literal word-for-word translation.

And it sounds awkward, doesn't it? In fact, it almost sounds nonsensical. I mean, it's one or the other, isn't it? I mean, he's either passing through or he's passing between. Which is it?

Well, it's both. And so, really, the idea here is this. That Jesus was traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

That's the idea. And it would be, by the way, the normal way for a Jew to travel from Galilee to Judea, where Jerusalem is located.

But this is the idea. He's traveling along the border. It's the east-west or west-east, because he's traveling from east to west, border between Galilee and Samaria.

[8 : 09] And so, what is the significance of this? Well, Samaria was located between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south.

All right? Samaria is right in the middle of, right in between the two. Jordan River flows down the eastern side, and then on the other side of that is the region of Perea.

All right? That's a little geography. Now, the Samaritans were not Jews. Now, you've heard it said that they were half-Jews, but really, technically speaking, they were just Gentiles.

Though there was a mixture of Jewish blood in many of the Samaritans, and you have to go all the way back, you know, to the captivity and so forth, and the people of that region, the Jews of that region, intermarried with pagans and Gentiles.

And so, it was a mixed race. But they're just simply Gentiles, really. Because you know that Jew and Gentile were the two kind of classifications of people in the world.

[9 : 12] All right? Now, you're either a Jew or you're Gentile. If you're a Jew, you're not a Gentile. If you're a Gentile, you're not a Jew. Or vice versa. Okay? And that's the classification that still exists today.

And there is no third classification. All right? So, here's the idea. We're kind of following this along. So, Jesus is traveling through, between Jews and Gentiles, is the idea.

And where is he headed? To the cross, ultimately. To Jerusalem and his cross. And so, Jesus is on the last leg of his journey to the cross.

And Luke is inspired by the Holy Spirit to insert this bit of information about the track or the route Jesus took. As if we really needed to know this.

But Luke introduces this for a purpose. And he does so so that we understand, once again, that Jesus' mission was to the whole world.

[10 : 20] Jew and Gentiles. And so, in a sense, his was a universal mission. That's what we need to get at this point.

A universal mission to the world. And we have that same mission today still, don't we? We do. But let's not stop there in the analysis of Luke's introduction to the story.

Luke, verse 12. Then, as he entered a certain village. A village, no doubt, located on the border. Or very near the border between Samaria and Galilee. And what happened? Well, there met him ten men who were lepers. I was just kind of walking through the story.

He met these ten lepers. All right, so there was a village located on or near the border between Samaria and Galilee. And no doubt, we could suppose that the population of that village was mixed.

[11 : 22] Mixed between Jew and Gentiles. Right on the border of these two regions. And that is why we later discover that this group of leprous men were a mix.

Mix of Gentile and Jew and Gentile. Because we know that at least one of them was a Samaritan. A Gentile. Okay, you following? That's pretty clear, isn't it? Now, here's what we should get about this. Jesus not only came with a universal mission to the world. Jew and Gentile. People of all nations and tribes and tongues.

A universal mission. But Jesus also came to a world with a universal condition. Sick. Sick with sin. And separated from God. Just like these ten lepers. Because you see, in the Bible, and I think most of us know this, leprosy was symbolic of the spiritual condition of man.

[12 : 40] It's a symbol of that. Like sin. Like sin. Leprosy was a terrible disease. Dreaded disease. Incurable.

Incurable disease. Like sin, leprosy was infectious. Infected the body. Until it infected the whole body.

But also from body to body. It was infectious. Just like sin. Like sin. Leprosy kept you from worshiping God. Because lepers were not allowed to.

They were barred from, rather, from the temple worship. They were barred from the sacrifice. They couldn't worship God. They were separated from Him. Because they were unclean. They were lepers.

See the picture? Like sin, leprosy not only separated you from God, but also separated you from your loved ones. From other people. And like sin, then, leprosy was a cruel bondage.

[13 : 45] Relentless bondage. A prison of isolation. You see, in a spiritual sense, I think you would agree with me, this world is one huge leper colony.

This is the condition of the soul. The universal condition of the human soul. Sin thick and separated from God.

Let's just see how this is pictured for us in the story. Because it's very vividly pictured here. As we see what it says about these ten lepers.

As a matter of fact, these ten lepers reveal three things. Three things about their condition that is symbolic of the condition of the soul.

Number one, like sin, leprosy was a hopeless condition. Hopeless. A hopeless condition.

[14 : 53] Verse 12. Then as he entered a certain village, there met him ten men who were lepers. And then, what does it say? Who stood afar off.

That's a statement of the hopelessness of their disease. They stood afar off. Now, you know this about lepers, don't you, in the Bible? Lepers could not live among other people.

That is, non-lepers. Non-lepers people, they couldn't live in society. They were not allowed to come in contact with other people who did not have leprosy. If you came down with leprosy, then you immediately had to leave your home and your family and your friends and your community and your church.

And you would have to then go and live in a leper colony, separated from everybody else, outside of the town, outside of society, secluded, isolated.

And you'd have to live there for the rest of your life. And if you were walking along the road, as apparently was the case here in our story, you're walking along the road and you would soon cross paths with someone, a non-leper, then you were bound by the Mosaic Law, Leviticus chapter 13, and also bound by just plain human decency to warn the approaching person or people that you're a leper.

[16 : 23] To warn them. You know, you know, they would call out, Unclean! And then they would know and then they would avoid you. Because you, by law, were not to come in contact with any other people.

Non-leperous people. And this was your sad condition for the rest of your life. Unless, of course, you were cured of your leprosy.

But that never happened because there was no cure for leprosy. Apart from some divine intervention, leprosy was a hopeless condition.

Likewise, apart from Christ's cross, God's divine intervention, sin is a hopeless condition.

But notice something else in the story. Number two, like sin, leprosy was a helpless condition. Helpless condition.

[17 : 28] Verse 13, And they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. They had only one possibility. Other than Jesus intervening, other than God having mercy, they were totally helpless.

They could not do anything about their condition. But just simply live with it. And suffer under it. Leprosy is really a disease of the nerves, by the way.

It's not a skin disease. Though it manifests itself, of course, in the skin. It starts in the skin. And quite often with tumor-like growths on the body.

And it would spread, of course, to the peripheral portions of the body, the hands, arms, the feet and legs, and particularly the face, nose, the earlobes and such.

And lepers typically experienced gross disfigurement. We kind of know this about it, don't we?

[18 : 39] I mean, their ears, earlobes would become grossly large and deformed. As well as the upper part of their ears kind of just decaying away.

Their nose would collapse into their face. Their fingers would curl up, forming kind of a claw kind of disfigurement.

It was very incapacitating. And their feet would swell, and their toes particularly would swell and become deformed.

In fact, sometimes have to be removed. The disfigurement would be so critical, so bad, and many other things. Now, because it is a disease of the nerves, advanced lepers would lose all feeling in their hands and in their feet.

And so they were unable to feel pain. In fact, there are documented incidents, even today, where lepers have had their fingers and their toes eaten off by rats because they didn't feel the pain.

[20 : 02] It's a sad situation. And just to walk, to walk and move around was extremely difficult for a leper.

What a hopeless condition. There was no cure. And so here we have these ten lepers standing afar off with this hopeless condition and shouting, crying out to Jesus, have mercy, with this helpless condition.

And you know that sin is a helpless condition. Helpless. For which the only cure is grace and mercy of God in salvation.

Helpless. Hopeless. This is the universal condition of the soul. But there's one more. A third. A heartless condition.

A heartless condition. Verse 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.

[21 : 21] And let me add a few words from the next verse. And one of them returned. All right? Now, why did Jesus command them to go show themselves to the priests?

Because that was the law. That was the Mosaic law. See, the priests were not only the spiritual leaders of the community, but they were also the medical examiners of the community.

They were skilled in this and trained in this. And they were trained to be able to examine people to find various physical ailments and to prescribe even to some point, you know, limited medical technology of the day.

They could prescribe treatments and such. And they also would make determinations about cleanliness and whether this person would be allowed to participate in the temple worship and so forth.

And that would involve a litany of different kind of ailments, not just leprosy. And so this was part of the law. And they were trained, the priests were also trained, to examine people for leprosy.

[22 : 27] And it was mandated by the Mosaic law in Leviticus chapter 14 that a former leper must be certified, cleansed by the priest before that leper, he or she, would be allowed to enter back into society.

That's just the way it worked. That was the law. The law. And by the way, did you know that for 1,500 years after these laws concerning leprosy were given, did you know that we don't have a single record in the Bible of a leper being cured, examined by the priest, and then released back into society, not a single one, for 1,500 years after that law was given?

No record of anything like that in the Bible. Now, you do have in the Bible Miriam, Moses' sister, who was healed of leprosy, but this predated this law on leprosy. And you have Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings chapter 5 also healed of leprosy, but he was not a Jew and so not obligated under the law.

But for 1,500 years since the law was given, we don't have a single incident of a Jew being healed of leprosy and then following the provision of the law to be able to go back into society for 1,500 years.

No record of it. Now, we have the law concerning such a thing. Leviticus chapter 14. But we don't have any incident where the law was ever used for 1,500 years until, until we get to the New Testament.

[24 : 11] It's really kind of amazing when you think of it. And can you imagine being part of the priesthood at some point during that 1,500 years and you're learning this law and memorizing this law and being trained on how to examine lepers to see if they're cleansed and wondering all the time why this 14th chapter of Leviticus was even in the law and you're probably even saying, I have read this chapter over and over and I've had not one time where I needed it.

But when Jesus came, everything changed. Jesus was healing leper after leper after leper. One leper after another was sent to the priest to be certified clean according to the regulations of Leviticus chapter 14. And I'm sure it was the buzz among the fraternity of the priests about what is this?

We've never even had to use this law and now we keep using it over and over again and you would think that these priests would be among the first ones to believe based upon this evidence.

But they didn't, did they? And neither did nine of the ten lepers. They saw the power of Christ.

[25 : 42] They experienced the healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ but did they return to give him credit? Did they return to give him glory, to give him thanks?

Well, no. They had no heart for that. A heartless condition. Interesting, is it not that these lepers took Jesus at his word and even took him at more than his words?

Did Jesus say anything about healing? Did he? No, he didn't. He didn't say anything about healing. Now, it's clearly implied, all right?

And yet, these guys certainly obeyed. they obeyed, clearly believing that they would be healed. I mean, it would be pointless to go show yourself to the priest if your leprosy has not been cured.

And so, they're standing there with leprosy. Why go to the priest? They clearly believed that Jesus' word was true. The cure, the healing, did not take place until after they headed to the priest.

[27 : 03] Remember? The Bible says, as they went, they were cleansed. That is, they were healed of leprosy. Now, I, for one, believe it was instantaneously.

As soon as they took that first step, boom, no more leprosy. That's why one of them immediately turned back and Jesus is still there to go and thank. But it didn't happen until they started, so they clearly had some trust in the word of Christ, didn't they?

And so what's the point? You know, a lot of people have a respect for the Bible. Did you know that? They have a respect for the principles taught in Scripture, the words of Christ.

Even non-believers will sometimes submit to the principles of God's word and guess what? It works! It works for them! God's word always works.

Whether you're a pagan or whether you are a believer. I mean, for example, even many principles that are used in the context of business.

[28 : 15] How to operate a business. You don't have to be a believer for those things to work. God's word works. And so you say, you know, you take Jesus at his word and they did and they were healed and so they believed the word of Christ and they were healed.

Wonderful! Because God's word always works. But that's not the same thing as salvation, is it? Because salvation is a matter of the heart.

It's the heart. These nine lepers took Jesus at his word and it worked for them. There is power in Christ's word.

But they did not give him glory. They did not give him praise. They did not thank him. Their hearts were not turned toward him.

They were not saved. They were not saved. This is the condition of the soul. Universal condition. Hopeless, helpless, heartless condition.

[29 : 33] And only the grace of God can change that. Just like these lepers. The condition of the soul. Let's move on to the second thing quickly.

I haven't spent too much time on the first one. And that is this. The conversion of the sinner. The conversion of the sinner.

All ten lepers were healed, right? Now that's clear from the text. But only one leper was saved.

Just one. And I say to you that that too is sufficiently clear from the text. That he was saved.

In case you're doubting, let's just establish that before we go any further. Jesus said in verse 19, your faith has made you well. That's the New King James Version.

[30 : 34] And yet most all modern translations will render it exactly that way. Though the King James uses the word whole. Whole. Your faith has made you whole.

And that really is closer to the idea here. The word, the Greek word is sozo. If you were spelling it in English, it would be S-O-Z-O.

Sozo. And it is usually, that word is usually translated saved in the Bible. And it is usually used in the context of salvation. Of spiritual salvation.

And so I think it's very clear that Samaritan leper, I mean at the very least, he received something very special here. Didn't he? He received something in addition to his healing.

He received something the other nine did not receive. This Samaritan was saved. He was saved. He believed.

[31 : 42] He believed. He became a follower of Jesus Christ. And we see the clear evidence of that in the story. In fact, there are five evidences.

Let me just name them quickly. Five evidences. This man was saved. Number one, this word, recognition.

Recognition of the truth and power of Christ and his word. that's the first evidence. A recognition of the truth and power of Christ and his word.

Verse 15, when he saw that he was healed, he returned. He saw that he was healed. See, Jesus, we've already talked a little bit about this, Jesus gave the word.

And this leper obeyed that word. word. And that's where salvation begins. It begins with the word of God.

[32 : 50] It begins with the word of God. Romans 10, 17. Faith comes by hearing. We know this passage, don't we? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. But really, I like the J.B.

Phillips translation because it brings out the full meaning of this. It goes like this. Faith can only come from hearing the message and the message is the word of Christ.

That's the idea. It's really the thing heard that brings salvation. Faith in the thing heard. It's the message of Christ.

It's the word of Christ. Now, at this point, of course, all ten of the lepers heard and obeyed the words of Christ, didn't they? There's a difference. The nine believed it, the word of Christ, for what it would do for them personally and physically.

They believed it for what it would do. But only one of them believed it also for who spoke it, whose word it was, and it was Christ.

[34 : 05] And so he did not just look to the what of the word, but he looked also to the who of it, to Jesus. And that's why he turned back. Recognition.

Recognition of the faith and power of Christ and his word. Number two, repentance. And that's clearly alluded to in the text. Repentance. Repentance toward Christ, Jesus Christ.

He turned to Christ. Christ. Verse 15, when he saw that he was healed, what? Returned. He returned.

He returned to Christ. Not to some priest, not to some religious ritual, not to some works of religion or righteousness. He came back to Christ.

his whole life and focus had turned to Jesus Christ. That's repentance.

[35 : 09] Third, reverence. Reverence. Reverence for Jesus Christ as his Savior and God.

Reverence for Jesus Christ as his Savior and God. verse 15 says, and with a loud voice glorified God. By the way, the meaning here is he glorified Jesus as God.

Really? I mean, notice how this is worded. It's very important. A little grammar lesson here. It says that he with a loud voice glorified God and fell down on his face at his feet.

Remember, words are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Whose feet did he fall down before?

the one he glorified God's feet in the person of Jesus, Jesus' feet.

[36 : 31] See, grammatically speaking, we've got some English teachers out there, either former public school teachers or home school teachers. Teach English, don't you?

people, the pronoun his, his feet, must have a precedent noun in the sentence.

And the precedent noun is God. So his is the antecedent of God.

And so we could translate it this way, we really could. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned and with a loud voice glorified God and fell down on his face at God's feet, giving God thanks.

He revered Jesus as his Savior and God. True salvation comes to those who believe that Jesus is God the Son, that he is the Lord of Glory, the Messiah, that he is God himself.

[37 : 42] A cardinal doctrine of the faith. If you are here this morning and you don't believe Jesus is God, then you're probably not saved. Recognition of the truth and power of Christ in his word, repentance toward Christ, reverence for Jesus as his Savior and God, and this is the true conversion of the sinner.

And also, number four, renunciation. Renunciation of self. He humbled himself before Christ. Verse 16, and fell down on his face at his, that is, Jesus' feet. Fell down at his feet. salvation involves the complete renunciation of self, of the love, self's love for sin, of self's faith in self, a renunciation of self.

And one more quickly, realization. Realization of what? Of the true source of all that is good. God, verse 16, giving him thanks.

You know, when a person is not thankful to God for everything he or she has, do you know what that says about that person? It says something about what they believe about God. That he is not the only true source of all that is good in this life, and therefore not worthy, solely worthy of our things.

[39 : 29] When the Bible says in James 1, 17, every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above.

And it comes down from the Father of lights, the great creator, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadows.

So everything from the air you breathe, to the life that exists inside your body, the food you eat, every single blessing of life comes from God.

It comes from God. So the conversion of the sinner. And the bottom line is the nine, these nine lepers who were healed, they were simply looking to Jesus with their outward eyes of need.

A lot of people looking to Jesus with outward eyes of need, personal need, physical or otherwise. And that's all that was going on with these nine lepers.

[40 : 42] But the one looked upon Jesus with the inward eyes of faith and he was saved. saved. And then finally this morning and what it all comes down to, the confirmation of the Savior.

We have the confirmation of the Savior. We don't have to speculate about all of this. We have what Jesus said. And Jesus confirmed the truth about this man's faith. Look at verse 17 again.

So Jesus answered and said, were there not ten cleansed? Well, of course he knows there were ten. But where are the nine? Well, he knows.

Where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner, this alien, this Samaritan, this Gentile?

And he said to him, and here's the confirmation of the Savior's, confirmation of this man's salvation. God arise as he lifted him up from his brokenness.

[41 : 56] Go your way. He liberated him from the burden of the law. He didn't have to go to any priest.

Go your way. You're liberated. You're free from the bondage and confines and condemnation of the law.

And then he says your faith has made you well. That is, he gave him life. Saved him. Lifted him up, liberated him, and gave him life everlasting.

that's the confirmation of the Savior. Alexander McLaren said, surely we may take that word in its deepest meaning and believe that more, a more fatal leprosy melted out of this man's spirit. A more fatal leprosy. That's exactly what happened. And through faith, that is what can happen to you. To you. To you. To you. To you.