

Just Passing Through Luke 17:11-19

Please stand as we read our text this morning.

By all accounts George Jones was the finest vocalist in country music. His career began in the 1950's and for decades he enjoyed great success professionally. But it was also well documented that he had great personal struggles. He suffered from alcoholism and a cocaine addiction. By 1979 he was homeless, deranged, and destitute. He lived in his car and was in pitiful physical shape. In 1981, he met Nancy Sepulvado who eventually became his wife. She had a very positive impact on Jones' life and career. She eventually cleaned up his finances, kept him away from his drug dealers and managed his career. George would be the first to tell you that Nancy changed and ultimately saved his life. But there was still something missing.

In 1996 George had a tragic car accident. It took first responders almost 2 hours to get him out. He was in a coma for over a week. When he woke up he asked to see Vestal Goodman, Gospel vocalist with the Happy Goodman's, whom he had met several months earlier. Little did he know that Vestal had been praying for him...even before the accident. Vestal was instrumental in leading the country legend to faith in Jesus Christ. Until his death there was a visible difference in his life. But it wasn't because of Nancy or even Vestal, George's life was changed because he met Jesus.

The Gospels include various accounts where Jesus touched lives as He was just passing by.

In John 4 we see Him passing through Cana where He met a nobleman whose son was dying. Jesus healed the son.

In Mark 1 while passing through Capernaum He met and healed a leper.

In Luke 10 Jesus was passing through the village of

Nain as a funeral procession was heading to the burial site. He healed the widow's son.

In Matthew 12 Jesus was passing through Galilee when he encountered a man possessed by a demon who had rendered the man both deaf and mute. Jesus healed him of his demon possession.

Passing through Capernaum, according to Mark 5, He healed a woman who had been plagued with a blood disorder for 12 years.

There are many other remarkable events in which as Jesus passed through He touched lives. That still happens today. We could share our own story. Somewhere along the road of life we met Jesus who touched us through salvation. The result was a significant change in us. We may not think so, but He made a big difference. We might not think that it is dramatic, but I assure you that even though you may not be able to see it, you were changed from darkness to light, from sinfulness to righteousness.

Jesus touches lives, amen? We have such an account today in our text. Jesus is on His way for one final visit to Jerusalem before He would die. Our text tells us He was traveling along the border between Samaria and Galilee. Remember that there was a lot of animosity between Jews and Samaritans. The latter was the product of mixed marriages between Jews and Gentiles. Though many claimed to follow God, they didn't worship in Jerusalem and they mixed pagan worship with Judaism. Their disdain for each other was mutual. Jews would sometimes pass through Samaria because it was a shorter route to some other region of Palestine. I'm not sure why, but the Samaritans didn't mind if Jews passed through coming from Jerusalem, but they didn't like it when they were traveling to Jerusalem. Maybe it was because they were not welcome to worship in Jerusalem and that's the main reason people would travel there. That's where Jesus and His disciples were headed. Somewhere along the way, they traveled through a

certain village. It could have been any village along the way. The location wasn't important. The reason, though, was.

I have said from time to time that every encounter we have is a divine encounter. We may think of it as an insignificant encounter where we are just passing by. Maybe you're traveling from Michigan to some other destination where you will vacation or visit family. You stop at a gas station just long enough to fill the tank and go in to buy a snack. You stop at the counter to pay and give a brief exchange with the cashier.

It's lunch time and you pull into a Cracker Barrel to stretch your legs and grab a bite to eat. You're just passing through but you encounter the waitress and perhaps a family also enjoying lunch.

Think for a moment about your day or your week and consider all the times you may just be passing through. But think too that in a brief encounter there are lives you may touch, lives that may be forever changed just because you were passing through. Something of significance may happen.

Somewhere along the way you have had an encounter with Jesus. It happened in our passage. He is passing through a village and is about to change the lives of 10 men. They approach Him. How they knew who Jesus was we are not certain. We're left to wonder if He had been in that village before. With no television back then they wouldn't have recognized Him from the news. *Time* magazine wasn't around to include Him on the cover as man of the year. It's not likely that little cherubs were hovering over Him or He had a glowing halo on top of His head. More than likely it was Jesus' reputation that had preceded Him. Someone in the previous village had raced ahead to this village to announce that Jesus was coming. Even if He had never passed through there before word of who He was and what He did traveled throughout the region. The 10 heard He was coming and had to see Him.

In these verses they ask for help.
Jesus answers by healing.
But only one adores from the heart.

I. THEY ASK FOR HELP – v. 11-13

A. Their Disease Was Costly – v. 12a

So here's the scene – Jesus and those following Him are on their way to Jerusalem. As they enter a village Jesus heard a noise. He turned and there were 10 men calling His name. By their appearance Jesus knew exactly what these men were. They were lepers. He didn't need an up close examination to understand their plight. The tell-tale signs were evident: rags for clothing, bandages wrapped around appendages and maybe draped on the head, perhaps some crutches. Their plight was painfully evident.

Leprosy was perhaps the most horrific disease in those days. Not that it isn't now, but we at least have a better medical understanding of it today than in Jesus' day. It was such a horrible disease with great fear of its contagious nature that laws surrounding it were included in the Mosaic Law given to Israel. It was a deadly disease, but just in case there was the remote possibility of being cured, certain regulations surrounded what a person had to do in order to be pronounced cleansed and free to rejoin society.

Leprosy is a disease that is deeper than the skin and begins with little white spots appearing on the skin. Those spots begin to harden and turn from white to pink to brown and become very scaly. Those sores then began to spread all over the body. They would afflict the face first; soon the appearance of the face would change. These sores would begin to fill with puss and run all over the body. There was a foul odor that others couldn't even stand to smell. Leprosy totally consumed the body. The eyebrows would fall out, and then the hair would turn white. A person with leprosy is someone who is literally

rotting away. With no feeling in the fingers and toes because of significant nerve damage the result would be that they would literally wear away appearing like they were falling off. Leprosy lasted an average of about 9 years until the victim would collapse and waste away.

Though this is a gruesome description of a physical disease, it is a great illustration of a spiritual disease. Isaiah (1:4-6) likens leprosy to sin.

Just as leprosy is deeper than the skin, sin goes deeper than the surface.

Just as leprosy had no cure, sin can't be cured on its own.

Just as leprosy ostracized the person from society, sin ostracizes us from God.

The grotesque physical nature of leprosy is a vivid picture of the grotesque spiritual nature of sin. These 10 men were being consumed by leprosy and they sought help for it. If their condition didn't change, it would eventually cost them their lives. And while they sought help from the disease, there was an even deadlier disease they had – they had a greater spiritual need. Because of the disease, they kept their distance.

B. Their Distance Was Calculated – v. 12b

Although it happened just a year ago with the threat of possible global implications we have all but forgotten the Ebola outbreak that found its way to our nation resulting in several fatalities. Victims were quarantined. Medical staff who cared for victims had to wear specially designed suits to avoid contamination. Vitals and symptoms were closely monitored. They had to follow strict protocol to ensure they didn't come in contact with the virus. The victims were virtually shut out from the world.

That was the daily life of the leper. Although they weren't quarantined to a room or a building, they had to announce their presence by shouting they

were unclean so people walking nearby could avoid them. They had to keep their distance. If the wind was at their back they had to stay at least a hundred feet away. Our text tells us that they were calling to Jesus from a distance. They knew the social protocol and ramifications for any infraction. The Law commanded distance.

In the Old Testament as Moses prepared to ascend up the mountain to receive the commandments from God, the Israelites were instructed to keep their distance from the mountain, lest they be struck down by God.

Recall the occasion when Jesus instructed Peter to push his boat out a little from the shore and then the great catch of fish that almost sank the boat that prompted Peter to tell Jesus to leave. He recognized that he was a sinner in the presence of one who was holy and wanted to distance himself from Christ.

The repentant tax collector prayed from a distance.

Scripture encourages us to draw near to God, but let's be careful how we approach Him. It is possible to approach Him too casually, to forget that we are to come to Him in reverence and awe and worship.

Even though they knew the kind of reputation Jesus had to heal, they still kept their distance.

C. Their Desire Was Clear – v. 13

Hebrews 4:14-16

Theirs was a desperate plea for Christ to show mercy on them. Their desire was clear. They wanted to be made well again, to be rid of that accursed disease and rejoin society. They wanted to hold their children and be welcomed into their neighbor's homes, to walk down the street and offer words of peace instead of always proclaiming "unclean, unclean."

Mercy – it's something we all need, but not a one of us deserves. In my college doctrine class the professor defined mercy simply as God not giving us what we deserve.

From Unger's Bible Dictionary we read "Mercy is a form of love determined by the state or condition of its objects. Their state is one of suffering and need, while they may be unworthy or ill-deserving. Mercy is at once the disposition of love respecting such, and the kindly ministry of love for their relief."

We love our children and extend mercy to them when we do not discipline them for disobedience. We receive mercy when we are caught speeding and the officer lets us go with a warning. We receive mercy from the boss when we should have been terminated.

The great playwright Shakespeare asked how we can ever hope for mercy. We deserve what is coming to us. Now I am not suggesting that somehow these 10 men deserved leprosy. That was the prevailing thought of the day. If something bad happened to you it was because of some sin. That's not the case. Remember the disciples asked Jesus about the blind man. Did he or his parents sin that resulted in his being born blind. Jesus' responded by saying that neither had sinned, but in order that God might be glorified through it.

Their leprosy was unfortunate and probably no fault of their own, but rather an opportunity to reveal His deity and bring glory to God. We are told that for those who love God, all things work together for good (Romans 8:28).

And since we're on it let me add that God's mercy toward us is not leniency on His part. His mercy does not mean that we are off the hook for our sin. Sin must be punished and that punishment would result in death. God will forgive sin only because first, Christ bore our deserved penalty for sin by

dying in our place and second, because we are repentant of that sin which we were born with and have committed throughout life bringing salvation and forgiveness.

His mercy will not be extended at the great white throne judgment. For those who rejected Christ.

Lamentations 3:22-23 reminds us that because of God's great faithfulness His mercies are new every morning. That is a great promise. It will not change.

Their disease would bring death and they did not want to die, so they asked Jesus to extend His mercy on them, to see their plight and give them another chance at life. Their desire is clear, they asked for help. So what is Jesus' response?

II. HE ANSWERS BY HEALING – v. 14

A. His Inspection Was Careful – v. 14a

Every step toward Jerusalem was bringing Jesus to His destination and His destiny. It would be there that He would bare the sin of the world on the cross. He wouldn't just incur the emotional pain inflicted by His own people who had rejected Him or the hatred by the religious establishment who should have welcomed Him and announced His Messiahship to the lost sheep of Israel. He wouldn't just undergo the physical punishment of the Roman soldiers beating Him and nailing Him to the cross. He would also experience the full wrath of God on Him as He bore our sin.

Yet, with the weight of sin literally about to be placed on Him, He took time to notice 10 lepers asking for help.

Think for a moment about that wonderful truth. Anyone who comes to Him He will not turn away. He came to serve not be served. He came to seek and save the lost. Here was an opportunity to do both.

What a wonderful truth is bound in those three simple words “He saw them.” He took notice of them and implies His compassion for them. Their need was obvious to Him as He looked at them, not just the physical need, the spiritual one as well.

Folks, that is you and me. In our need He took notice of us, He sees us. When we cry out for mercy, His ear is tuned to such a plea. He knows our need and has compassion on us. But it’s one thing to see a need and another to do something about it. He gave a careful inspection of their need. Notice also that His instruction was clear.

B. His Instruction Was Clear – v. 14b
 “Go, show yourselves to the priests.”

That’s it?
 He’s not going to touch us?
 He’s not going to pronounce some word of healing over us?
 He’s not going to do anything, just send us away?
 The priest will just look at us and tell us what we already know, we’re unclean.

After everything they may have heard about this great healer, maybe they felt like Jesus didn’t really care, or maybe they thought He didn’t want to be bothered.
 Maybe they felt a little put off by Jesus seemingly shrugging them off.

Naaman felt the same way. He was told by a Jewish servant girl about this prophet in Israel who could heal his leprosy. With a great entourage he rode to Israel to see Elisha so that he could be healed. Elisha told him to go dunk himself seven times in the Jordan River. He became indignant and rode off, but his servants reasoned with him to do it. When he did, he was healed.

Jesus’ instruction shows us that He was not putting Himself above the law, but rather that He submitted Himself to it. According to Leviticus 14 they were

to show themselves to the priest who would quarantine them for a period of time and inspect them again. If they were found to be clean then they were to offer sacrifices. The Law had certain requirements and Jesus wanted them to fulfill it.

By doing this it would bring the priest face to face with the reality of the claims of Jesus, that He had the power to heal and that this power authenticated His claim to be deity, a claim they denied. They would once more have to make a decision about Christ. Based on their observation of the 10 lepers healed, men most likely who had been pronounced unclean by the same priest, they could not deny what had happened.

I wonder, how have we responded when we have seen the work of Christ? Have we responded like the religious leaders rejecting His claim?

This was a clear test of their faith. Would they obey or not, the outcome was completely contingent on what they did, whether they trusted Him. His words implied healing, but they must obey.

His instruction was clear.
 His intention was curative.

C. His Intention Was Curative – v. 14c
 “And as they went, they were cleansed.”

They were rewarded for their obedience.
 They were rewarded for their faith.
 The power of Jesus can heal. Once they observed the purification ceremony they could return to their homes and families. They had been transformed.

And that is the kind of spiritual healing that Jesus wants to do in a person who cries out for Him to have mercy on a sinner. He sees the spiritual need that is deeper than our behavior. He sees the heart and He desires to heal us of our sin. What Christ did on the cross is curative in regard to our sin. He takes something that without Him is incurable,

without Him the situation is hopeless and He brings deliverance and our lives are transformed forever.

So how did they respond to such a transformation?

III. ONLY ONE ADORES FROM THE HEART – v. 15-19

We observe from our passage that when they realized they were healed only one of the 10 returned to Jesus. All 10 were healed, but only 1 returned. Here's what happened.

A. He Offered Worthwhile Praise – v. 15

When he saw the leprosy was gone, that he had been made clean from the dreaded disease, he returned to Christ offering praise to God with a loud voice. He acknowledged the true source of his healing – God and He praised God. He knew that the only person to truly pronounce him clean was Jesus.

Warren Wiersbe suggests that all too often we are quick to pray and plead, but slow to praise. We're quick to ask, but slow to adore. Give God thanks.

Luke adds something about him – he was a Samaritan. The other nine, probably all Jews, headed out to fulfill the requirements of the Law to the letter. This Samaritan headed back to praise the one who deserved it.

I'm not sure why only one came back. Maybe the other nine felt they deserved to be healed, they were from God's chosen people. Maybe they felt they were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do and that was good enough. Maybe at the core they really were ungrateful. The thing is only one came back to give praise. Maybe the percentage is accurate.

Maybe there is only 10% of the population that is truly grateful. Let's be the 10%. Let's remember to

offer worthwhile praise for His mercy.

Psalm 107:8 "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men."

Psalm 150:6 "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

I love the little chorus by Don Moen in our hymnal.
Give thanks with a grateful heart;
Give thanks to the Holy One;

This Samaritan returned with a grateful heart in praise to God.

Psalm 100:1 "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth."

Consider all that the Lord has done for us and give Him thanks. Shout aloud and don't be passive, don't be restrained – let it out.

If we were among the 10 healed that day, who would we be most like? Would we be like the ungrateful nine or the unusual one?

As they went, they were healed immediately and the Samaritan turned and came back praising God.

When we call out in mercy to God to have mercy on us in our lost condition, our faith makes an immediate change. Offer God worthwhile praise. And notice also he offered a worshipful posture.

B. He offered a Worshipful Posture – v. 16

"He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him."

As John was on the island of Patmos exiled there for his faith, he had a vision of the exalted Christ standing before him. Revelation 1:17 says that when he saw this vision he fell down at His feet.

In chapter 4 as John continues to explain the vision of heaven, he witnesses the four living creatures who continually fall down before the Lord to worship Him who lives for ever and ever. And then

again in chapter 5 as they sing about the Lamb being worthy to take the scroll and open its seals the 24 elders fall down and worship. And then chapter 7 all the angels and elders and four living creatures fall down and give God thanks and praise forever.

Our posture in approaching the Lord of lords and King of kings is to be one of reverence and awe, one of submission, one of worship.

Come let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our God, our Maker.

What is your posture in His presence? Is it a worshipful posture that expresses submission and awe? But why should we bow before Him?

C. Jesus Offered a Wonderful Pardon – v. 17-19

Seeing that only one returned to give thanks, Jesus asked if all 10 were cleansed. It is a rhetorical question because He already knew that all 10 had been healed of their disease. He also asked where the other nine were.

While healthy, Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with each other, yet here we see that a disease such as leprosy broke down social barriers. It is no respecter of persons touching the rich and poor, men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile. Their common disease brought them together, yet their attitude in healing separated them. Once more they would be separated as enemies and separated by their response.

Jesus concludes with a wonderful promise. This is no ordinary promise. It is not a promise of physical healing. The Samaritan had already received cleansing for his physical malady. Jesus gave something entirely different to this man. “Your faith has made you well.” His faith had already healed him. Jesus does not use the same word in verse 14 when they were cleansed. He does not use the same word in verse 15 when it says they were

healed. He uses a Greek word, the root of which is translated saved. It’s the same word used in verses like John 3:17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

Acts 2:21 “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Acts 2:47 “...And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Romans 5:9-10 “Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through Him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!”

Jesus was saying the Samaritan wasn’t just physically healed, he was also spiritually healed, something the other nine did not experience. The nine represent unbelieving Israel. They only wanted what they could get from Christ – things that were physical like healing, food, and rescue. They would not acknowledge Him as Savior and God or worship Him and would not receive spiritual healing. The Samaritan represents those who are given eternal life through Christ.

We all experience the common grace of the Lord. He sends the rain and sun on the righteous and on the unrighteous alike. But, only some experience His saving grace. They are the ones who receive eternal life.

With what the Lord has done for us, offered us, given us in His mercy and through His grace, have we offered worthwhile praise?

Have we offered a worshipful posture?

Have we received His offer of a wonderful pardon?

Jesus is passing by – call out to Him for His mercy and He will heal your soul.