

"BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?"

Luke 17:11-19

Intro: The story before us in this passage from Luke's Gospel is recorded only by Luke. It is a story of great importance since it gives us a special insight into the heart of our Savior. He was on His way to Jerusalem, and went from Galilee through Samaria. It seems that He was moving south along the Jordan River, would go to Jericho, and from Jericho eventually into Jerusalem.

Just where this event took place, we cannot say for certain. It might have been in a Samaritan village. What we do know is that there were ten men who had the dreaded disease of leprosy. There is some question among medical authorities as to whether or not this was the disease which we know today as leprosy, but I will leave that for them to settle. We do know that it was a very terrible disease, a fatal disease. Those who contracted leprosy became social outcasts, and they usually died a slow and awful death. These ten men had been drawn together because they all had the same problem. Luke tells us that one was a Samaritan, and it seems that we are safe in assuming that the other nine were Jews. Under normal circumstances the Jews would not have had anything to do with the Samaritan, but, since they were all lepers, the social barrier between them was gone.

Let us note the evidence of:

I. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (Luke 17:11, 12).

There is another story in the Bible, in the Gospel of John, involving a Samaritan—a woman! Most of you will remember the account in John 4. There is one statement in that story that I would like to remind you of which I believe could also be applied to this story of the ten lepers.

It is easy for us to think of the Lord going from the south in Israel to the north, and then south again, as though He were just wandering from place to place, ministering to people as He might see people in need. But the Lord never did anything by chance. If our steps are ordered by God, much more were His! The Lord's life was carefully planned before the foundation of the earth, and all that He did on earth was done in fulfillment of the plan of God for His life.

The statement that I have reference to in John 4 with regard to that visit to Samaria, is this: **"And he must needs go through Samaria"** (John 4:4). **"Must needs"** means that it was necessary, absolutely necessary, for the Lord Jesus to go to

Samaria, and to go there at that particular time. It was not like we might say, "Someday I plan to go to such and such a place, but it really doesn't make any difference as to when I go." The Lord did not live like that. The Lord was under a constraint place upon Him by the decree of God to go to Samaria at that particular time! BUT WHY? Because there were people the Lord intended to save in that place, and it was all to start by His talking to one particular woman.

A man by the name of J. H. Thayer, who late in the last century, wrote a Greek Lexicon, or dictionary, said that this word denotes more than a moral obligation; it speaks of "that constraint which arises from divine appointment" (p. 126). He also said that it is a "necessity established by the counsel and decree of God" (Ibid.).

So it was in the purpose of God for that Samaritan woman, and the men who received her testimony, to hear the Gospel at that time so they could be saved. I repeat: The Lord did not work then by chance, nor does He work today by chance.

So when we take this truth back to Luke 17 we must see that the contact with the ten lepers was not initiated by the ten lepers; it was initiated by God Himself!

Recently Oscar and Rose Burns, and Lucille and I, went up to Stevenson, Washington for the funeral of Fay Olson's mother. She was also David Lillegard's grandmother. While we were sitting in the Methodist church waiting for the funeral to get started, I pulled a hymn book out of the rack in front of me, and started looking through it, curious to see what hymns they had. I was pleased to see that they had many of the great hymns of the church which speak of the Cross, and the blood of Christ. Anyone reading through those hymns would be confronted with the Gospel message.

But the reason I am mentioning this is because one of the hymns in the hymnal was the one that is in our hymnal, which we have sung many times. The words of the first verse go like this:

I sought the Lord, but afterward I knew
He moved my heart to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of thee.

The last verse says this:

I find, I walk, I love, but, O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to thee;
For thou went long beforehand with my soul,
Always thou lovedst me.

Whenever you find a person seeking the Lord, you can always

be sure that the Lord was seeking that person first! No man ever initiates his own contact with the Lord; the Lord acts first, and we are simply responding to Him. That was true with the ten lepers. We see in this story the working out of the providence of God. This is something that we all need to understand about the Lord's dealings with ourselves, and the same is true about His dealings with everyone else who has ever been saved, or who ever will be saved. Always start with God, and then you will be in a better position to understand what is going on.

Now let us look at:

II. THE APPROACH OF THE LEPERS (Luke 17:12b, 13).

We need to note two things:

- A. They "stood afar off" (v.12b).
- B. They cried out with loud voices (v.13).

This gives us a twofold picture:

- 1) The first, of humility.
- 2) The second, of an intense desire.

They, in their desire to attract the Lord's attention, did not forget that they were lepers. And they forbidden by the Mosaic Law to approach a clean person. So they kept their distance.

On the other hand, they wanted the Lord to know of their need so that He would have mercy upon them. They did not know that they were the reason that He was there in that village at that particular time.

Notice what they cried out: "Jesus, Master."

The word that they used for "Master" is only found in the NT in Luke's Gospel. Cf. Luke 5:5; 8:24, 25; 9:33, 49; and here. It is a term recognizing the Lord's authority--perhaps only His authority over diseases; we do not know. But we do know that they had heard of Him, and believed that He was there only hope of regaining their health.

Their humility is also seen in their urgent cry for help because they said, "Have mercy upon us." This meant that they knew that they could not produce one single reason as to why the Lord should help them. But their plea was like that of the publican who said, "God be merciful to me the sinner" (Luke 18:13). We do not know if these men felt that their leprosy was a judgment from God, but at least the only claim

that they felt they had on the Lord was from His mercy.

This, too, shows evidence of the work of the Lord upon their hearts. They felt that Jesus, as they called Him, was not obligated to do anything for them. But they also believed that He could do exactly what they needed as far as their physical condition was concerned.

III. THE LORD'S RESPONSE (Luke 17:14).

He did not heal them; He simply told them to go show themselves to the priest. This was the law for those who had been cleansed of leprosy, not for men who still had the disease. Cf. Lev. 14.

The Lord's ways are quite amazing. He rarely does the same thing twice in the same way. But whatever the Lord does always calls for the exercising of faith.

When the Lord said this, the question was: Would the ten lepers believe Him? And a second question was: Would they show that they believed Him by doing what He said?

The answer to both questions was, YES! They did believe Him! And a most wonderful thing happened: **"And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were healed."**

How far they went before this happened, we are not told. But it was before they got to the priest! "They were healed." A miracle had been performed! All of a sudden every trace of that dreaded disease was gone!

NOW WE COME TO THE SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE STORY.

IV. THE RESPONSE OF THE LEPERS (Luke 17:15-19).

Nine went on to see the priest; one turned back before he got to the priest. He was so overwhelmed with gratitude that he **"turned back, and glorified God with a loud voice."** And after he got back to the Lord, he **"fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks."**

He was not ashamed to let his praise be known. He knew that God had performed a miracle in his body, and he wanted everyone to know that he knew it was something that God had done. And falling at the Lord's feet, he gave thanks to the Lord.

Then Luke tells us an important part of this miracle: **"And he was a Samaritan."**

This man had two counts against him: (1) He was a leper; (2)

He was a Samaritan. He knew that a double portion of God's mercy had been given to him. And he probably felt that he had twice as many reasons for being grateful for what the Lord had done for him.

But then the Lord asked a question: **"Were there not ten cleansed? BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?"**

Verse 18 seems to indicate that the Lord asked these questions to the people who were standing around.

And then He answered His own question: **"There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."**

Let me review the story for you. Here were ten men infected with a hopeless disease. For some reason they did not feel that they had any right to expect the Lord to do anything for them. But they cast themselves upon His mercy, that by grace they might receive something which they did not deserve. The Lord miraculously healed them, but only one came back to say, "Thank you, Jesus." To state it percentage-wise, the Lord got a 10% return of praise from His investment in those ten men.

But notice: What the Lord said to this one man He would also have said to the other nine! Their faith had made them whole. They all started out to do what the Lord told them to do, and as they went they were healed. They believed the Lord. And they were healed. Perhaps the others were so overcome with joy that they went on to the priest, not thinking of returning, like the Samaritan did, to glorify God and to thank the Lord for what He had done.

Concl: The lesson is clear, isn't it? Both the OT and the NT are full of teaching regarding praise and thanksgiving. It is such a simple thing to do, and we have so many reasons for doing it, that it is amazing that we do so little.

Those of us who are saved have the greatest of all reasons to be grateful to the Lord. We did not deserve that either. But God sought us, Christ bought us, and the Holy Spirit brought us to God through Christ. And yet how many of us are there who praise the Lord every day for the abundant salvation we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then think of the daily blessings we enjoy: the physical blessing, the material blessings, the spiritual blessings. We keep asking the Lord for blessing, and the Lord keeps giving us all kinds of blessings. **BUT ARE WE LIKE THE CLEANSED LEPER? DO WE RETURN TO GIVE THANKS TO OUR GOD? OR**

ARE WE LIKE THE NINE WHO, AS FAR AS WE KNOW, NEVER CAME BACK?

It is a sin not to be thankful! And it is a major sin. In Rom. 1:21 when the Lord was citing the sins of the early human race, we find the charge: "Neither were thankful."

When are people thankful to God?

They are thankful to God when they recognize that their blessings have come from Him. They are also thankful to God when they realize that they do not deserve the blessings that the Lord has given them. And they are thankful to God when they stop to realize that things could so easily have gone in the opposite direction. We could be among those in the world who today are starving. We could be among those who have physical needs, but no one to help them. We could be among those who have never heard the Gospel. But for some reason God has been gracious to us, and most of us, maybe all of us, are on our way to heaven.

Our nation has recently come through a very terrible war, and yet one in which there have been amazingly few casualties on our side, and the enemy has been defeated in just 100 days! But, comparatively, it seems that very few have been praising the Lord for what has happened. We have a great President. We probably have the most capable military men to be found any place in the world. We have thousands of dedicated, well-trained, and efficient men and women in all branches of our service. Our President has gathered around himself some very capable men who have shared in the honors. And we have had thousands of allies who also have stood with us in getting what surely will go down as one of the greatest victories of all time.

"BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?" Where are the people who have come to the end of those terrible days of war to give thanks to God? How many are looking beyond the human instruments that God has used to see that ultimately He is the only One deserving of the glory. He is really the One Who deserves our thanks. We are to give honor to those to whom it is due, but the glory belongs to God.

We all know that we do not deserve such a victory. Many of us felt that maybe this would be the time when the Lord would humiliate us before the nations of the earth because of our many sins. But He has not done that. He has kept the door of His mercy open to us. This should be a time not only of national thanksgiving, but of national repentance. The danger we face now is that of being proud of our victory. Pride means that we are taking the credit and not giving it to God.

How encouraging it was to me, and I am sure that it has been to many of you, that our President has come out with a proclamation calling us as a nation to join with him in seeing aside three days, April, 5, 6, and 7, "as national days of thanksgiving." I want to read this Proclamation to you, and I feel sure that our hearts will respond to thank the Lord with our President, and to thank the Lord for moving upon His heart to give such glory to God, and for calling us as a nation to these days of thanksgiving.

(The Proclamation.)

I wish it could be said that all of our people who died in this war, and those of our coalition partners who died in this war, have gone to heaven. But we do not go to heaven by dying for our country. We go to heaven only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Who died to save sinners. But we certainly pray for the families of those who died, and trust that those who died had made peace with God through faith in the Christ and His death on the Cross. And perhaps these days of prayer will, by the grace of God, be the beginning of a mighty work of the Spirit of God throughout the world, turning us from our sins, and causing us to take our places with the Samaritan of that day long ago who returned to thank the Lord not only for saving him from death by leprosy, but it would seem also that he was saved from eternal death through trusting in Christ. I trust that the Lord will enable us to have, not 10% thanksgiving, but 100%.