

45. Ten Healed of Leprosy

Luke 17:1-19

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

After talking about the reality of Hell in His warning to the Pharisees and religious elite in the previous passage, Jesus then turned his attention to the disciples to train them ahead of his departure and His ascension to the Father. In verses 1-10, the Lord Jesus gave four instructions to them. First, He warned them to be careful with the influence they have, reminding them and all in responsible positions of authority that there will be a calling to account for all that is said and done on our walk through this world (vv. 1-2). Secondly, Jesus talked about disciples being those who readily forgive and harbor no bad attitudes toward one another (vv. 3-4). Thirdly, He taught them how to increase their faith (vv. 5-6). Lastly, He focused on serving God with no expectations (vv. 7-10). Luke then highlighted for us Jesus' noticing the grateful attitude of only one of ten leprous men that returned to give thanks (vv. 11-19).

Sin and Accountability (vv. 1-2).

¹Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. ²It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin (Luke" 17:1-2).

When Luke wrote his Gospel, he didn't write it with chapter divisions. Chapter divisions were added much later by a man named Stephen Langton in the year A.D. 1227.¹ Luke wrote that Jesus continued His journey toward Jerusalem after He spoke these ten verses we are now studying (Luke 17:11). We can logically conclude that verses 1-10 carry on from the talk in chapter 16 about the Rich Man and Lazarus.

The rich man had been quite concerned about his five brothers (Luke 16:28) for a perfect reason; he had been a bad influence in their lives. He was confident that they were headed for the same eternal destination in which he was. The rich man had an impact on the lives of his brothers, and he knew that they looked up to him and emulated his lifestyle. An eternity in hell with his brothers' blaming him would be worse than the situation he was presently experiencing. The more influence a person has, the greater the responsibility and accountability he has. Perhaps, Jesus had the rich man in mind when He said, "but woe to that person through whom they come" (v. 1).

Leadership is an often-used word today, but what does it mean? How do we define leadership? When is a person a leader? The obvious answer is that a leader is a person who, through his influence, has followers. Adolf Hitler was a leader, a very influential leader for evil, leading his people along a destructive path. Winston Churchill also was a great leader for the British during the Second World War. Through his stirring speeches, the British people were inspired to stand firm at their lowest hour before America came into the Second World War. If one works backward from the point of obtaining followers, leadership would be the ability to influence

¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_273.cfm

others. Jesus is saying that, when we are dealing with eternity, the ability to influence others, if improperly used, can be damning to a person's soul.

We live in a world where the temptation to sin bombards us every day. Jesus told them that **“Things that cause people to sin are bound to come” (v. 1)**. He used the Greek word *skandalon* to describe the temptation to sin. It was used to describe the bait in a trap; we get the phrase *scandal* from it. Later, the word came to mean any *stumbling block* placed in a person's way to trip him.² Jesus warns us to be careful with the influence we exert. We are not to put stumbling blocks in the way of others that might cause “little ones,” i.e., those who are young in the faith, to fall from the grace of Christ. The Lord says that it would be better if a millstone were to be tied around scandal-givers' necks and for them to be thrown in the sea rather than hinder the relationship between a person and God.



Upper and Lower Millstone.

Question 1) Who or what are the influencers today for good or for evil? What stumbling blocks have tried to trip you or influence you? Who has been a godly influence in your life?

Daily, we are bombarded by influencers through the Internet, television, radio, newspapers, etc. Indeed, the media exerts a powerful influence in our world today. All editors, politicians, business leaders, pastors, educational professors, school teachers, movie stars, film producers, and rock stars are all people who exert an ability to persuade people to follow them or model themselves after them. The higher the influence and trust in the office, which the leader has, the higher the accountability before God. It is a fearful thing to be an influencer, and one should tread lightly as he goes through this world as an influencer. Better to be taken early from this life, a millstone tied to him, and be thrown into the sea rather than cause one person to be tripped from following Christ because of something done or said.

Disciples Readily Forgive One Another (vv. 3-4).

² William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Luke*, Printed by The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1975. Page 215.

³ Used with permission. © Michael Martin. Images of Capernaum: www.ntimages.com/Capernaum-tns.htm

³So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, “I repent,” forgive him (Luke 17:3-4).

By this time, the disciples were living on top of one another in close community for approximately three years. Things happened among the disciples that caused them to be in conflict with one another. They must have occasionally gotten under each other's skin. I think specifically of the time that James and John tried to get ahead of the other disciples by trying to get the principal places to the left and right of Jesus when the Lord would come into His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-24).

Can you imagine how the other disciples felt about this jockeying for position by the two disciples? Jesus was careful that they walked in a spirit of forgiveness for one another. The Lord is not teaching that we are to point out every single fault we see in one another. If a person is driving seventy-five miles an hour in a seventy-mile-an-hour speed limit, we should not think of correcting the person, i.e., we are not to be junior Holy Spirit! Allow the Lord to do His corrective and convicting work.

In the passage we are studying, the Lord Jesus talks about things we see in a brother with whom we are in a close relationship, and mutual accountability, such as the twelve disciples had with one another. First, there is to be a gentle private rebuke, and if it is not heeded, then bring two or three others. Only after that and if correction is still not heeded, then the problem should be shared with others that are also in a relationship with the person in the house church or small group (Matthew 18:15-17). Remember that all the early churches were house churches where the believers ate together and enjoyed close community (Acts 2:42-47).

These words we are looking at are not for a church of many thousands; it is for only those that the person is in a relationship together in a house church or small group situation. I note that forgiveness was not to be extended until there was repentance (v. 3). I have found no place in the whole of the Scriptures where God forgives without repentance. As he was being crucified, Jesus prayed that God would extend forgiveness (Luke 23:34). We can also read where Stephen prayed a similar prayer of forgiveness to those that were murdering him as he was stoned (Acts 7:60). Nowhere are we told that forgiveness was granted without repentance on the part of those committing the injury. Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3).

To walk in a spirit of forgiveness is as much for our sakes as others. Nelson Mandela said, “Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”⁴ Shannon Wiersbitzky noted, “Being forgiven is like having all the worst bits of yourself stuffed into a balloon and then having that balloon set free.”⁵ It is a fragrance of Christ extended to others to live a life forgiving those who have hurt you. To be able to do such a thing requires the grace of God, and it brings us, quite literally, a freedom that is “out of this world.”

Increasing Faith (vv. 5-6).

⁴ <http://thoughtcatalog.com/lorenzo-jensen-iii/2015/05/the-100-all-time-greatest-quotes-about-forgiveness/>

⁵ Ibid

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you (Luke 17:5-6).

Question 2) Why were the disciples asking about increasing their faith after Jesus' words about forgiveness? Why is faith compared to a mustard seed?

As they related to one another in their small group of thirteen, the twelve were often lacking in God's grace. They needed a faith-lift to help them to forgive each other to the degree that Jesus was asking of them, i.e., seven times in a day (v. 4). They must choose to live in a way counter-culture to the world in which they were living. The disciples were also living at a time when hatred and bitterness against the Roman occupation had crept into the national soul of the Jewish people.

A mustard seed grows from a tiny seed to a tree. C. Marvin Pate, a Greek scholar, writing on the comment of Jesus, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed..." says:

The mixed condition (of the Greek sentence) is probably designed to affirm that the disciples did have faith, but that it required growth. Regardless of the technicalities of the grammar involved, however, the verse is clear in its focus—the smallest amount of faith in God can produce miracles.⁶

For a seed such as the mustard seed to grow into a tree requires it to go through several stages. First, it must die to itself:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:24-25).

When a seed is sown, its outer nature, the husk, must break open; it dies to itself, but the life that is within the seed begins to take root and grow. Each of us must die to our self so that the life of God that comes when we are born again of God's Spirit (John 3:3) can grow and be nourished by the Word of God, which is the spiritual food that nourishes us (Psalm 1:1-3). The beautiful truth is that Christ comes and takes residence in our lives when we receive Him (Colossians 1:27). When Christ sits on the throne of our hearts, to every one of us is given a measure of faith:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Romans 12:3 King James Version).

Your measure of faith may feel very small, but it has excellent potential locked up inside it. The crucial thing is this: "What will you do with your measure of faith?" Just as a mustard seed will grow to become a tree, so faith needs to grow, too. Faith is like a muscle; it must be exercised to grow. It's also like an elastic band that must be stretched to be effective. God will be faithful in

⁶ C. Marvin Pate, *Moody Gospel Luke Commentary*, Published by Moody Press, Chicago, 1995. Page 325.

allowing tests to come your way to nurture and increase your faith, but it will depend on your responses to the tests. Some people do not respond to the challenge and bailout to a smooth exit through compromise. In 1980, when I married my wife, Sandy, to stay in the United States, I had to fill out a form which asked me if I had ever been convicted of a drug offense. I was tempted to lie about my two marijuana convictions in England. After all, who in America would know? These were committed in my youth, and before I gave my life to Christ. □

Looking back, I wonder how, if I had lied on my Resident Visa forms, how it would have hindered my growth in the faith. I told the truth on the forms and, consequently, had to leave the USA and spent more than eighteen years back in England while I church-planted twice. It would have probably changed many events that followed. I suspect that I would never have church planted and be doing the things I am doing now, equipping Christians to grow in their faith. To grow in faith will require you to go through many tests the Lord brings and to be obedient to Christ even when it hurts.

Question 3) What are small ways to increase our faith? How is faith grown from a tiny seed? If a new Christian were to ask you how to grow in faith, how would you answer?

To grow your seed of faith into a great tree will require you to believe the Word of God. Faith is not believing that God **can** sort out a situation in your life; it's believing that God **will**. Spiritual growth in the area of your faith requires that you act on the Scriptures. When Peter, the disciple of Jesus, was in his boat on the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus came walking on water toward him, he had to act on what he believed:

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:28-30) □

All the disciples believed that Christ had the power to keep Peter from sinking, but only Peter believed that He would. Peter was alone in taking the action step of trusting God to hold him up. This kind of experiential faith only comes to a person when He steps out to trust Christ for a thing God has put on his heart to do. Peter had to risk he would not go under when he took that first step, i.e., transferring his balance from the foot in the boat to the foot in the water. □

We will not stretch our faith and believe God if we never ask Him. We don't focus on the sea and the situation when we step out in faith; we focus our attention on Jesus. Go for small wins with your faith; don't pray for something beyond the level of what you can believe. Exercise your faith in the proportion of your belief that God will answer your prayer. Peter had arrived at a place in his life where he saw again and again the miracles of Jesus. He had confidence that the Lord would see him through walking on water.

Many of us have mountains of difficulties that stand against us. For one, it may be a wandering spouse, and for another, it is a son or daughter that is wandering away from the faith. It could be a great need for physical healing. Let me ask you this: have you considered calling on the Lord to move by His Spirit? The Lord **"is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us"** (Ephesians 3:20). It is not according to any

ability or strength that we draw from ourselves, but it is “Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).□

Sometimes, God will challenge your belief and require you to do something to express your trust and faith in God's power. We find that very topic in verses 11-19, with the story of the ten leprous men. Before that, though, the Lord spoke to His disciples to be people who will serve God with gracious attitudes and no expectations:□

Serving God with no Expectations (vv. 7-10).

⁷Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, “Come along now and sit down to eat”?
⁸Would he not rather say, “Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink”?
⁹Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?
¹⁰So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty” (Luke 17:7-10).

The Lord now gave His disciples a rhetorical question about a master and his servant. Today, it would be like our expecting our boss at work to prepare our dinner for us after we've been working all day. The Pharisees that were listening felt like God was in their debt due to their going further than what He required by keeping the Ten Commandments. Those who are alive to God should never think God owes us or that we are deserving of His blessings when we walk in obedience to Him. We are to marvel at the grace of God, which we have received undeservedly.

Ten Healed of Leprosy (vv. 11-19).

After the series of parables and teaching of the previous chapters, the disciples and Jesus carried on their journey of traveling toward Jerusalem and stopping at various towns and villages on the way. The Lord knew that He would be crucified at the celebration of Passover, but at this point, He is still twenty to forty miles away on the border between Samaria and Galilee. On the outskirts of one unnamed village, ten leprous men recognize the band of disciples with Jesus leading them.

¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:11-14a).

In New Testament times, the word *leprosy* described many different skin diseases. In modern times, we now call this affliction Hansen’s Disease. In Leviticus 14:1-32, the Law of Moses directed the priests, the health inspectors of the day, to restrict lepers from the community and force them to keep at least fifty yards between them and healthy people. They were to cry out, “Unclean, Unclean!” to anyone that came close while at the same time to ring a bell. One of them was a Samaritan (v. 16), with whom Jews did not normally associate and regarded with scorn as an apostate from the Jewish faith. It's interesting to find that the nine Jews and the one

Samaritan were living in the Samaritan territory, an area that Jews typically bypassed. Here we see them living in community, mutually supporting one another, perhaps receiving more help from a Samaritan village rather than Jewish territory. □

Question 4) Why would Jesus send the ten lepers to the priests unhealed instead of healing them on the spot? What do you think was on the mind of the Samaritan as he started on the way to see a Jewish priest?

It's interesting to see that Jesus required them to do what a cured leper would do even though they were not yet healed. He required them to take steps of faith and trust His Word. In Luke 5:12-14, when Jesus healed the leprous man, He reached out and touched him, healing him instantly. However, here in this passage, there was no touch and very little communication. He told them to go to the priest to get a clean bill of health. There may have been a priest in a nearby Jewish town, but it more than likely meant they were to travel to the Jerusalem Temple to see the priest and get the pronouncement of health certificate to be readmitted into society. This journey required faith because as they started the route, they were not yet healed.

In the healing ministry of Jesus, He sometimes required an act of faith by the person to bring about the healing. For instance, when the man born blind was healed, Jesus put mud in his eyes and told him to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam. I'm sure that some who saw him staggering toward Siloam tried to wipe his eyes, but he refused and carried on to the pool, washing his eyes only in the place the Lord had said (John 9:1-6). He was rewarded by his sight restored only after he washed. These ten leprous men were only healed as they were on the journey. □

It would have seemed stupid to them as they started on their journey to go and get a health certificate when their faces and limbs were marred with leprosy. As the Samaritan began to walk, he would have logically thought that he should go to the site of the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, certainly a lot closer than the priest in the nearest Jewish village or the Jerusalem temple itself. Sometimes, our logic can take us away from simple obedience to the Lord's Word. Being with nine Jews, the Samaritan would have thought that Jesus might not have known that he was a foreigner. As he set out toward the nearest Jewish priest, I wonder if the thought crossed his mind that the healing would not work for him due to the animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. He certainly would not have wanted to go to Jerusalem, a lot further away. As a Samaritan, he could get killed in Jerusalem. A Jewish priest would have demanded that he be secluded for eight days to make sure of his healing, and only at the end of that time, would he be able to offer a sacrifice and get a clean bill of health to reenter the community. How strange it would have seemed to go somewhere to get a clean bill of health when he had not yet been healed. The phrase reads, "In their departing, they were cleansed." □

The story is told of a man crossing a desert in the days of the pioneers. He ran into trouble and was dying of thirst when he spotted a pump near an abandoned shack. He had no water to prime the pump, but he noticed a jug of water near the pump with a note attached. It read: "There is just enough water in this jug to prime the pump, but not if you drink some first. This well has never gone dry, even in the worst of times. Pour the water in the top of the pump and pump the handle quickly. After you have had a drink, refill this jug for the next man who comes along."

What would the man dying of thirst do? To follow the instructions and prime the pump without first taking a drink would be an exercise of the kind of belief about which the Bible speaks. Biblical faith requires that one stake his life on the truth of the promise. If the man follows the instructions, he takes the chance of pouring out all the water and getting none to drink if the pump fails. So, he must trust that the message is right. He must act in belief, without first receiving and must trust in the truth of the promise.⁷

And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" ¹⁸Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:14b-19).

How far do you think they traveled before the healing started to take place? Imagine their surprise that, while they are walking, their fingers began to grow, their toes suddenly fill their shoes, and they can feel that the skin on their faces is soft and that their noses had grown out again! Undoubtedly, the ten stood incredulous as however far they got, they began to look at each other and see their healing taking place on the way! The Samaritan was so ecstatic with praise to God that he could not contain himself. He left the company of the nine still feeling their renewed skin, and began to run back to find Jesus and thank Him. This man knew how to give thanks. He shouted at the top of his voice to God as he approached Jesus and threw himself on the ground, lavishly shouting his praise. Again, we see one who had been forgiven much and loved much in return (Luke 7:41-43), how that must have warmed the Lord's heart! What disappointed Him, was that the nine Jewish people did not return once they realized they were healed. Why are some people so thankful while others lack appreciation? Let's never forget to thank the Lord for all he does for us. □

Let me issue you a challenge: Think of a situation in your life, which needs resolution. It may be an impossible thing to you, but dare to believe that God can work through your simple faith. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Call out to Him and ask Him for faith to believe that He will accomplish what you ask of Him. Then, praise Him, loudly!

Prayer: Father, I pray for all who read these words, that You would come alongside them right now and impart faith to their hearts. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

⁷ Edited by Michael Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*. Published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI. Page 135.