

Were There Not Ten?

Luke 17:11-19

Ten Lepers cried out to Jesus for mercy. Mercy was given. But only one gave thanks. If we fail to give thanks, our prayer is being trivial with God. How bad is it to be trivial with God? Perhaps a closer look at this story will help us find out.

- Luke 17:11-12 – Ten men were in the same predicament. They had leprosy.
- Luke 17:13 – They all cried out to Jesus for mercy.
- Luke 17:14 – Jesus gave them all the same help and the same instructions (i.e. to follow the procedure of the law by showing themselves to the priests).
- Luke 17:15-16 – One of the ten men, when he saw that he was cleansed, was so filled with gratitude and loud praise to God that he turned back to see Jesus, to honor and to thank Him. It is here that the man is identified as a Samaritan.
- Luke 17:17 – Jesus questioned why the other nine did not come back to glorify God.
- Luke 17:18-19 – Jesus commended the “stranger / foreigner” (the Samaritan) and told him that his faith had made him whole / sound / well – had saved / delivered him.

It could be asked, “Why did Jesus postpone the cleansing until after they had departed to see the priests?” Jesus often does things differently / uniquely when He is working with people. He was probably testing the faith and priorities of these ten men. These men suffered physically, mentally, socially, and financially because of this disease. Their need was great. They were desperate for help. They begged Jesus for help, and they were following His instructions. The sooner they got to the priests and were declared healed of their disease, the sooner they could get back to family, friends, and a normal life again. They got what they asked for and that’s all that nine of them wanted.

Is this not a picture of people who see religion as a way of getting their needs met? If they just do the status quo, they will have peace and prosperity. Health, and a reasonable amount of pleasure and possessions is all they want and all they get. When there’s a problem they will just go back to the dispatcher of blessings and try to secure a “nice” life. These same people might bail out on God when things go wrong.

Israel had been slaves in Egypt. God delivered them out of that bondage and gave them their own land, where they would prosper. Here is a warning that God gave the nation Israel, prior to entering into that promised land:

“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God...”

– Deuteronomy 8:7-11a

We are encouraged to seek the Lord for help. But don't just seek His favors. Seek Him personally. God has so much more to give us than just material help so that we can survive this life. *“Seek the LORD, and His strength: Seek His face evermore.”* (Psalm 105:4)

Jesus told the Samaritan, *“Your faith has made you whole / well.”* – *“Your faith has saved / delivered you.”* He did not say this to the other nine. Jesus saw the Samaritan as one who, with child-like faith, took this as such an undeserved personal favor, that he responded in a very passionate and personal way. The Samaritan looked past the hand and sought the heart of the one who was so kind to him. This is what Jesus is looking for. Jesus gave this Samaritan the assurance that a greater salvation was now his. A salvation that lasts forever.

So faith is not just trying to get favors and help for the necessities of this life. Faith considers eternity and understands that we are nothing without God and His grace. We owe Him everything. We can offer Him nothing except to repent of our sins and to love and trust His Son, Jesus Christ. See Psalm 100; 103:1-5; John 5:24; II Corinthians 9:15; Ephesians 1:3, 12; Hebrews 11:6.

A word about Samaritans:

They are depicted, in the gospels, from a Jewish standpoint, as the unlikely and unlikeable candidates for having favor with God. Among the Jews, it was an insult to call someone a Samaritan (John 8:48). Samaritans also had a bias against the Jews. Jesus corrected the disciples who wanted to retaliate against them (Luke 9:51-56). Jesus made it a point to go through Samaria, when Jews would normally avoid the area (John 4:3-9, 27-42). Jesus used a “good Samaritan” as a positive example when teaching Jewish people (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus commended the faith of a Samaritan and commented on the lack of faith and love that was in nine other Jewish men that He healed (Luke 17:11-19). Do we have prejudices and biases that hinder us from being used of the Lord in the salvation of men? See Romans 15:5-7; I Corinthians 9:19-23; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:1-9.