

**Ten Lepers and a Samaritan's Faith (17:11–19)\*** This passage appears to be a simple healing account. But this miracle is not like most other miracles, since the healing itself is not emphasized as much as the reaction to it. As with all five miracles in the journey section, the miracle is less important than its results. Jesus heals as he continues his journey to meet his fate in Jerusalem. Luke often notes the journey's progress, but the notes become more frequent as Jerusalem nears (9:50–52; 13:22, 33; 14:25; 17:11; 18:35; 19:1, 11, 28, 41, 44). Jesus is passing between Samaria and Galilee. Moving east to west, his journey of destiny continues. That he would meet a Samaritan in this setting is not surprising.

The lepers of ancient society were rejected. They were treated as outcasts, like many who have AIDS today (see discussion of 5:12–16). They were required to live outside the city in leper camps (Num 5:2–3) and were to cry out to warn others to keep away from them as they walked the streets (Lev 13:45–46).

The ten of this story cry out, only this time it is for mercy. Such calls to Jesus are common in the Gospels (Mt 9:27; 15:22; Mk 10:47–48; Lk 16:24; 18:38–39). The lepers are perceptive: they understand that merciful acts constitute a major aspect of Jesus' ministry. The address of Jesus as "Master" is Luke's way of saying that Jesus has authority, since Luke uses it in texts where the other Synoptics have "Teacher" or "Rabbi" (Lk 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33). There is no significance to the number ten, though later the fact that one is different from the other nine will be significant. The only question at this point is whether Jesus' work of compassion will continue, given the strong rejection that has arisen against him.

The answer comes quickly. When Jesus tells the men to go to the priest to prove that they have been cleansed, it is clear that Jesus has acted to heal them (Lev 13:1–8; 14:1–11; Mk 1:44; Lk 5:14). Jesus mentions going to *the priests*, using the plural, because there are so many of them. The priests will be busy receiving testimonies about Jesus' work! The request calls for faith, since the men must turn and go to the priests without having experienced the healing first. In that sense the miracle is like Elisha's telling Naaman to go wash himself in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10–15). As they depart, they are cleansed. Jesus does not touch them as he had the leper of 5:12–14. The messianic times are present as Jesus heals from a distance (7:1–10, 22). The prospect of normal life has returned to the ten through the Master's work.

The lessons of the healing follow. There are several points: (1) God's mercy should yield thanksgiving. (2) God works through Jesus (v. 15). (3) Getting close to God is a matter of trusting him. One who seems far away can really be near. (4) The outsider, the foreigner (*allogēnēs*), is the

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**\* Notes: 17:11–19** This miracle is unique to Luke, but some have tried to regard it as a duplicate of Mark 1:40–45. The connection is very doubtful, given the account's differences, not the least of which are the number of lepers involved and the focus on Samaritans in Luke, not to mention the presence of a clear parallel to Mark 1 in Luke 5:12–16. Also of interest is the miracle's similarity to the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:9–19. Though it is wrong, given the vast differences, to assume that Luke created the story based on this earlier account, there is a mirroring in the rendering of certain details that indicates this healing is like the great works of old (Nolland 1993:845).

**17:16–18** There are some nice Greek touches in these verses. The reflexive pronoun *autos* in verse 16 emphatically highlights the Samaritan's nationality. Jesus' first question in verse 17 uses the particle *ouchi*, so it expects a positive answer. In the second question, the interrogative *pou* trails, adding a note of emphasis to the query. The question's mood is, "The nine ... where are they?" The question in verse 18 uses the particle *ouk* and also expects a positive answer.

most sensitive to Jesus. Those who respond to God may not be the ones we expect to respond. (5) God's blessing can be appreciated or underappreciated.

It is this last point that Jesus highlights when he asks, "*Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?*" Only the foreigner has returned to give thanks. Now what Jesus praises here is the Samaritan's initiative. Jesus had instructed the men to go to the priest. All of them had turned to do so, apparently. But only one has taken the trouble to return and thank Jesus. God's graciousness is often ignored and unappreciated. In addition, often those who have blessed forget to take time to thank those God uses. Jesus appreciates the Samaritan's sensitivity and commends it.

So Jesus asks, "*Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?*" Yes, he was the only one who gave thanks. Those who do not take blessings for granted make up an exclusive club of surprising people. In our small group at church we recently studied joy. In the materials we used there was a discussion of how some Americans had gained fortunes in the early 1980s: "The average salary for Fortune 1000 CEO's is over \$500,000/year. The actor Marlon Brando is said to have collected a fee of \$3 million plus \$15 million in profit percentages for a mere 12 days work in the 1978 film *Superman*—a rate of \$1 million a day." Many people in Western nations are showered with material blessing. Yet an article in *U.S. News & World Report* on the wealthy of the same period reported, "Half of those considered successful by their peers are unhappy." Why is this so?

Maybe it is because success and meaning are being defined in the wrong places by the wrong things. Life's real blessings are not valued and appreciated, while things that cannot really bless are assigned value and worth they do not really possess. Often our families and friends and, more important, the God of life are underappreciated, taken advantage of or ignored—not necessarily to their detriment, but always to ours.

There is one other lesson in the exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan man. God's grace, even though it is extended to all, does not mean that all gain salvation. God blesses humanity in a general way, but only the responsive who appreciate what he has done in Christ receive his full blessing and acceptance. Among the ten former lepers, only the Samaritan hears the comforting words "*Your faith has made you well.*" His gratitude has revealed his faith. Jesus commends him for his response and assures him that the appreciation he expressed is also appreciated.

When one surveys the Scripture to see what we are called to be grateful for, an interesting point emerges. Often biblical texts simply call on us to thank God. No specific reason is cited. It is a "fill in the blank" exercise, an exercise in reflection on how God has been good recently. The perspective seems to be: Look for the sun; do not dwell on the clouds. Don't focus on events or things, but on people and on God. Perhaps if we responded to God and other people in this way, life would be brighter. A typical passage is 1 Chronicles 29:10–13, in which God is to be thanked for his presence and availability. But if we live apart from God, who is there to thank? The pursuit of things, status or power ultimately is a lonely existence.

A perusal of the Word provides a full list of large reasons to be grateful. God is thanked for his deliverance (Ps 35:18), for loving us and being faithful (Ps 52:9; 107:8), for hearing our cry (Ps 118:21), for safe arrival after a long, arduous journey (Acts 28:15), for other believers and for the testimony of their faith (Rom 1:8), for the gift of salvation that enables one not to sin (Rom 6:17), for delivering us from our tendency to sin (Rom 7:25), for the spiritual gift of being able to address God (1 Cor 14:18), for resurrection hope (1 Cor 15:57), for testimony, deliverance and victory in the midst of persecution (2 Cor 2:14), for the support of a colleague in ministry (2 Cor 8:16), for other believers (Phil 1:3; Col 1:3; 2 Tim 1:3; Philem 4), for those who respond to God's Word (1

Thess 2:13), for being able to serve others for God (1 Tim 1:12) and for his attributes (Rev 4:9). Those are just some of the options for thanksgiving.

Notice that this list includes not one item having to do with things, with possessions. The occasions for gratitude all have to do with relationships or circumstances in relationship to others. Colossians 3:15 says to “be thankful.” That is what the foreigner was. That is what disciples are to be. Remember thank-yous, especially to our good, gracious and great God—and let the sun shine in.<sup>1</sup>

## **Dedication Across Boundaries: Overcoming Contagion and Prejudice (17:11–19)**

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Dedication overcomes religious and racial prejudice to accomplish God's work and spread God's message.*

**17:11.** Jesus maintained his course: “on to Jerusalem” (see 9:21 13:22; 18:31; 19:28). This course did not detour around Samaria, the land populated by people whom Jews considered half-breeds who were unworthy of God’s blessings or their friendship. Entering Samaria and encountering Samaritans made Jesus unclean under the Jewish law.

**17:12–13.** As if he were not unclean enough, Jesus met ten men who suffered from a terrible skin disease (see 5:12). The men knew their condition. Any contact with them made other people unclean (Lev. 13:42–46). Still, they knew Jesus’ reputation for healing, so they shouted from a distance. Calling Jesus “Master” (5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49), they begged for mercy. Mercy, in their case, would mean empathy and pity that would lead to an act of healing.

**17:14.** Jesus pronounced no great healing formula. He did nothing dramatic. He uttered a simple command: Go let the priests see you. Such a command demanded action from the sick men. To run to the priests meant to show them that they were no longer infected and so could return to normal human contacts. But they had to start to the priests before they were healed. All ten exercised faith in what Jesus said. They started for the priests. When they did, healing came.

**17:15–16.** Healing sent nine of the lepers scurrying to the priests at a rapid clip. But one of the men reversed direction; he returned to thank Jesus. He did not seek a private session to say thank you. He screamed praise and thanksgiving to God so everyone could hear. He knew what Jesus did had come directly from God. The man fell at Christ’s feet to say thank you. Not only was this person an unclean leper, but he was also an unclean Samaritan. Why would Jesus deal with a person doubly unclean? Is this the nature of God, to bring healing and salvation to sinners, unclean people, rather than to the religious self-righteous?

**17:17–19.** Jesus responded to thanks giving and praise with a surprising question: Where are the other nine who were healed? Did only **this foreigner** return to show what God had done and let God get the glory for it? Note that on Jesus’ lips “foreigner” was not a word of scorn and contempt. of fact to bring to the attention of the town and especially of the disciples the identity of this man. By identifying the foreigner, he showed the “superiority” of the foreign man of faith to the Jewish men who lacked faith.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bock, D.L., 1994. [Luke](#), Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>2</sup> Butler, T.C., 2000. [Luke](#), Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.