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The Leprosy Mission - Letting the Light In Devotionals

**Week 2 - Thankfulness**

Luke 17:11-19

“You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.” “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til you lose it.” I expect at least one of those statements has put a song in your head. Various musicians have penned those words, because they reflect something important about how we think. We often only realise how valuable something was in retrospect. I expect this is true of what many of us are feeling at the moment while in self-isolation. So many sociable hobbies are not possible, from sports clubs to choirs. We suddenly miss the simplicity of meeting a friend at a coffee shop. Many of us aren’t very good at verbalising our thankfulness for what we have.

If someone asked you to retell a narrative about leprosy in the Bible, perhaps your mind would jump to the account of Jesus healing the ten men affected by leprosy in Luke’s gospel. I would suggest that this passage has very little to do with leprosy! It has much more to do with faith and thankfulness.

This account occurs when Jesus has set his face towards Jerusalem, where he knows he will be crucified. As he makes his way there with his disciples, he teaches them. On his way into a village, Jesus meets ten men with leprosy who stand at a distance and call out in a loud voice ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’ Jesus tells them to ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests’. And as they go, they are cured of their leprosy.

In the Old Testament law, people affected by leprosy who no longer had visible symptoms would go to the priest to be examined and pronounced clean. This was important for the individual to be able to re-enter society among God’s people. Strikingly, in this narrative Jesus tells the ten men to go to the priest while they are still visibly affected by leprosy.

All ten men show a measure of faith in Jesus. They call Jesus ‘Master’, recognising his authority over their leprosy. They show their faith through obedience to his command to show themselves to the priests and as a result, they are cured on their way. Up to now, the ten men have acted as one. But now, one of the men does four things differently. Firstly, he turns back. It may be that in his excitement, he returns to Jesus before he gets to the priest. Secondly, he praises God in a loud voice. He clearly isn’t embarrassed to do this in public; he is so overwhelmed to have been cured that this praise flows out of him.

Thirdly, he falls down at Jesus’ feet. This is astounding to think of a Samaritan throwing himself at the feet of Jesus, a Jew who in normal circumstances would’ve been his enemy. But it seems Jesus is not just ‘a Jew’ to him because falling at Jesus’ feet is most likely an act of worship.

The Greek phrase ‘fell down’ is used in the New Testament followed by ‘worship’ in some key places. For example, the Magi fall down and worship the baby Jesus when they meet him. Satan tempts Jesus to fall down and worship him. In Revelation, the elders fall down and worship before the throne of the Lord God Almighty. The Samaritan has realised what a wonderful gift the cure for his leprosy is. I believe he has understood that a wonderful gift comes from an even greater giver. The cure for his leprosy was a gift of love from an eternal Father through his Son.

Fourthly, he thanked Jesus. This is the first time Luke has used this word ‘thanked’ in his gospel. The Samaritan’s faith has led to gratefulness. Jesus asks ‘Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?’ The nine Jewish men that had been cured show that their temporary faith in Jesus did not lead to gratitude. This is not something new within the Biblical narrative. The Israelites often grumbled in the wilderness, rather than being thankful to God for rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. But the Samaritan’s thankfulness demonstrates his faith.

Jesus says to the Samaritan ‘Rise and go, your faith has made you well.’ The Samaritan has already been cured of leprosy, as have the other nine. The Samaritan has been made ‘well’ in a deeper way; he has recognised that the cure was a gift from God and he responds in praise, worship and thanksgiving. He isn’t made well because of the quantity of his faith. He is made well because he has recognised that what matters is whom he has faith in, Jesus who works miracles through God’s power.

Many people affected by leprosy today are so thankful that they too have been cured. Felshiya lives in northern Sri Lanka, and when her husband heard that she had leprosy, he left her alone with her young daughter Akira. Felshiya felt stressed and lonely. Now she has had the cure for her leprosy and has received counselling. She is so thankful to the counsellors, because now she feels empowered to build a new life. She has been able to stand up for her rights and as a result, her husband has been ordered to support his wife and daughter. Akira also had leprosy, but she has received the cure and she has started school. She loves to sing all day long, even in her sleep!

At this complex and uncertain time, I have taken solace in the words of Paul to the Philippians: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” It can be easy to summarise this to “don’t worry about anything; pray about everything”, but this loses that key little phrase: “with thanksgiving”.

We can learn to be thankful for all that God has done for us. Above all, he has given us the gift of faith so that we can be called his children. Why not keep a diary at the end of each day for things you can be thankful for? It might be the arrival of a food delivery or hearing the voice of a friend over the phone. Whatever it is for each of us, let’s choose to be thankful.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

*Written by Chris Stratta*

**Luke 17:11-19**

**11**Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. **12**As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance **13**and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

**14**When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

**15**One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. **16**He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

**17**Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? **18**Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” **19**Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

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