Where are the other nine?

Luke 17:11-19

Key Verse 17-18

“Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”

One father told me that his experience as a father of many children helps him to understand the importance of thanksgiving in today’s passage. Being a father, he is ready to do anything for his children, regardless of the amount of sacrifice of his time or money or energy or anything. He does all he can do for his children. As a father, who is busy, he made his time out of his busy schedule and thought about their needs and concern and spent time and did something for them. His children are wonderful kids. But somehow they do not show any sign of being thankful although all he wants is just mere recognition. They took it for granted. The response of his children reminded him of how his heavenly Father would feel if he is not thankful.

So today we want to learn why thanksgiving is so important in our relationship with God. My message has two parts. Part I. Jesus, master, have pity on us! (v.11-14) Part II. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him (v.15-19)

**Part I. Jesus, master, have pity on us! (v.11-14)**

Look at verses 11-14.

**“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.” And as they went, they were cleansed.”**

This is the story between Jesus and ten lepers. I never met any leper. But this is what I heard when I grew up. When I was an elementary student, rumors said that lepers wanted to eat liver of little children in order to be healed. So little children should be very careful. So whenever I had to walk alone along mountain alleys to visit my grandfather from time to time I had to suffer from severe fear that lepers would come out of woods and kill me and eat my liver. I did not know that lepers were separated and lived in a separate place. I had no idea who spread such rumors. But it was all well known rumor among young children in my town. So I thought lepers were like monsters who want to eat human livers. I thought lepers were such wicked people who wanted to kill little children and eat their livers. But bible reveals unbearable suffering of lepers.

Lepers in those times suffered from many things. First of all, they suffered from hopelessness. Leprosy in those times was incurable disease. So to become lepers mean to die slowly in such a cursed situation. There was no hope to be cued of leprosy. So they were condemned to die slowly. Who wants to die? But lepers were doomed to die without any hope once you become lepers.

Secondly, the lepers suffered from sense of condemnation from God. Since the bible shows that God used leprosy to punish people they could think that God punished them through leprosy, and they were condemned and punished by God. Miriam became a leper when she challenged the authority of Moses. King Uzziah got leprosy when he tried to burn incense which was the duty of priest.

Thirdly, the lepers suffered from loneliness. They were cast out from their family members and villages and had to live in an isolated place by themselves. They were separated from normal society and fellowship with other people. They had to live by themselves leaving all family members and their friends and all people they knew. The separation was for the purpose of protecting other healthy people because leprosy was highly contagious. But still it was a great pain to be separated from their close people. Ten lepers in today’s passage lived along the border between Samaria and Galilee probably because they were driven to the borders from their towns of Samaria and Galilee.

Fourthly, the lepers suffered from ugly image of themselves because their faces and their bodies would be disfigured as times went by. As the disease advanced they would lose noses and fingers and hands and toes and feet etc. I planned to show one picture but it was too much disturbing. So I can not show it.

Fifthly, the lepers suffered from shame. They had to shout out, ‘unclean’ and ‘unclean’ if they have to move among people, identifying themselves as unclean people. Every man has desire to appear clean and righteous. But these lepers could not have such desire.

Sixthly, the lepers must have suffered from the doubt of God’s love. The lepers did not want to become lepers. They did not know how they got leprosy. One day the leprosy broke out and they found that they became lepers. They could suffer from doubt of God’s love, crying out, ‘why me?’ They could see others who were more wicked did not get leprosy but they became lepers.

I am sure they did everything they could do in order to be healed. But nothing worked out. They were in despair. But somehow they must heard a news or rumors that Jesus healed people miraculously. When they found out that Jesus was coming in their way they gathered all their strength and went out to meet him.

They could not come near to Jesus. So they stood at a distance, and they called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, master, have pity on us.” They even did not bother to say, “Please heal us.” Just to say ‘Have pity on us” was enough.

They called Jesus as ‘master’. They somehow believed that Jesus was their master and they believed their master Jesus might have power to heal their leprosy.

Sometimes all we can do is just call to God, saying, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” when we are completely powerless over our problems.

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

Jesus knew the meaning of their cries. He went to the point without beating around the bush. He simply commanded, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” In those days priests worked as medical doctors. So they would issue health certificate to lepers after the lepers were healed. Then lepers could return to their home towns.

So to say to lepers, “Go, show yourselves to the priests’ means ‘I tell you. You are already healed. Therefore go, show yourselves to the priests and get health certificate.”

And they were cleansed as they went. So when they started to go, they were not healed of their leprosy. But they believed Jesus’ word and obeyed it. They believed that they were already cleansed although they could see their leprosy with their own eyes. And as they went they were healed.

When Jesus said to them, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests” it was the moment of testing. It was the time of the testing of their faith. But they simply obeyed without raising any questions or doubts. How could they do that? How could they not say, “Jesus, master, how can you ask us to believe we are already healed? Don’t you see that we still have leprosy? Are you trying to drive us out in this way?”

I believe they could obey Jesus immediately without any doubt or questions because they were completely humble. How could they become humble, humble enough to obey whatever Jesus said? It was because their unbearable pain and suffering as lepers made them absolutely humble. They knew they were powerless over their disease. They were absolutely vulnerable to the point that they were ready to do whatever Jesus said. In their complete vulnerability they were able to meet their God.

**Palms 51:16-17**

**16You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.**

God does not despise when we are completely broken or vulnerable or powerless. But rather he meets us when we are broken and powerless. People meet God when they are broken.

One day one alcoholic said to his doctor in excitement, “Faith in God works. It helps me to be sober.” Then the doctor said, “I don’t understand what you are talking about, the faith in God. But anything is better than your destruction through drinking. So go head. Anything is better than losing your job, your health, your family and eventually committing suicide after destroying everything you have.” At the time of unbearable pain and suffering and brokenness the alcoholic met his God.

In life, we have many troubles which we cannot understand. There are much pain and suffering which is out of our control. But we can see our pain and suffering and trials in life as the opportunity for us to humble and obey God. Indeed our troubles can be the Lord’s blessing in disguise because we can meet God in our brokenness.

Although the lepers might have suffered from the doubt of God’s love for them, their disease blessed them so much. They became so humble to the point of obeying whatever Jesus said without any doubts and questions. Then their powerlessness opened the way for them to meet their God.

And they were cleansed as they went. The Lord blessed their faith and obedience. Many times Jesus heals people when they obey him. And their obedience is the proof of their faith in him. For example, Jesus commanded a born blind beggar, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” And the blind man obeyed and he opened his eyes.

Jesus said to servants in wedding in Cana in Galilee, “Now draw some water and take it to the master of the banquet” although it was water instead of wine. (John 2:8) But when they obeyed the water turned into wine.

Peter said to one crippled man, “In the name of Jesus Christ, walk!” The crippled man obeyed and he was healed and he could stand up.

The word of God has power to heal us when we obey it.

**Part II. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him (v.15-19)**

Now look at verses 15-19.

**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?  18Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”**

When all ten were cleansed, only one leper came back, praising God in a loud voice. He was so thankful that he threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Probably the other nine lepers could be Jewish lepers. Jews despised Samaritans. But his despised condition as Samaritan made him even more humble than Jewish lepers. He could not control his thankful heart. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.

Then Jesus asked, **“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?”**

Nine lepers called Jesus as ‘master’. But their actions show that they were masters of Jesus, and Jesus was their servant. They simply took advantage of Jesus. From that time on, they might call out Jesus “Jesus, master, have pity on us” whenever they faced other desperate situations. But obviously Jesus was not their master. Jesus was their servant and he was only used by them when they needed his help.

Why didn’t the nine leper return? Were they not thankful? They could be thankful. But they were not thankful enough to return and give praise God. They might be thankful, but their action did not follow.

What is the difference in their hearts of nine lepers before they were healed and after they were healed? Before they were healed, their heart condition was broken and humble. They were ready to obey anything from Jesus, standing as servants of Jesus. They knew they were powerless over their problem. They only relied on Jesus’ mercy.

Their heart condition after they were healed was full of confidence. They thought that now they could do so many things because they were healed. They were confident that they could manage their lives well. They were not ready to obey anything from Jesus as Jesus’ servants. They stood as confident men who could do many things on their own strength. Suddenly they became busy when they thought about catching up many things which they could not do such as raising up families, or establishing careers and business, having parties, and enjoying delicious foods etc.

So the main difference of the heart condition of the nine lepers before they were cleansed and after they were cleansed is ‘powerlessness’ and ‘confidence’. But Apostle Paul said in **1Co 10:12** “**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”**

Many believers including ourselves cry out to Jesus when we have desperate problems, ‘Jesus, master, have pity on us’. We even make vows. “If you help me this, I will do this for you. I promise!” After Jesus solve our problems, we do not show up. We do not keep our vows. We say, “Oh, I made a hasty bow which I cannot keep. I believe God will understand and forgive me. Anyhow already he has forgiven all my sins through Jesus.” And we call out Jesus again and again whenever we have urgent problems. “Jesus, master, have pity on me. I promise this time that I will keep my vow and even old ones. Please help!” And the same process is repeated again and again. Are we different than the nine lepers?

Finally, Jesus said to the thankful leper. **“Rise and go. Your faith has made you well.”** Jesus has made him well. But Jesus gave all the credit to the thankful leper. He said, “Your faith has made you well.”

What kind of faith does the thankful leper have? He had faith to believe Jesus’ healing, and he had faith to give thanks to Jesus. His faith made him well. He was healed not only physically but also spiritually establishing personal relationship with Jesus.

Probably this will happen in the future. When the thankful leper will go to heaven, Jesus will say to him, “Welcome, my dear friend, heavenly feast is waiting for you. Join in your master’s happiness.” But when the nine lepers will show up Jesus will say to them, “I don’t know you. Away from me, you evildoers.” Then they will say, “Jesus, master, don’t you remember that you healed all of us on the border between Samaria and Galilee?” Jesus will say to them, “I don’t know you. Away from me, you evildoers.”

Now, how can we apply today’s passage for us more?

**Firstly, we all should see ourselves as these lepers were: unclean before God and men.**

If we are honest, we can see how much we are unclean before God and men. We can see our leprosy only when we are ready to be honest. Before we are honest, we are not able to see our inner leprosy and we cannot be cured of it. It is because our pride blinds our eyes to see how unclean we are before God and men.

How can we know that we are unclean? We can know it when we judge others.

Jesus said in **Matthew 7:1-5 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”**

Here, Jesus showed our uncleanness. When we judge others we think we are better than others. But Jesus says that we become hypocrites when we judge others. It is because we do worse things than those whom we judge. Think about ourselves. How many times do we judge others? Our judgment shows that how much we are unclean before God and men. To accept the fact that we are unclean is one of the most difficult things for us. It is because we are all so proud. We become sinners because we are proud in our hearts. Our pride, selfishness, self-centeredness is the core reason of our sinfulness.

Bible teachers are so accustomed to teach others that they can fall into this trap. Sometimes they are obsessed to teach others. But the truth is they need to repent and be changed first.

**Secondly, we all should do as these lepers did: call out to Jesus for mercy.**

The only way for us to be cured of our inner leprosy, which is our pride is to call out to Jesus for mercy. It is because we cannot heal us. Our pride and selfishness blinds our eyes that we cannot see our uncleanness before God and men. It blinds our eyes that we cannot see our powerlessness. So we keep trying to fix ourselves in vain.

But we should call out to God, ‘Jesus, master, have pity on us’. To know our sin and our powerlessness is the most difficult job. To believe Jesus has power instead of us is the challenging task for us to accept because we are proud.

**Thirdly, we all should respond as these lepers: with obedient faith.**

What does Jesus command us to do? “Do not judge others”; “Forgive one another and love one another”; “repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Jesus asked us to confess our sins and pray for each other. But we cannot do so when we only see other people’s repentant topics so clearly, but we are blind to our repentant topics.

We know in knowledge that we are not perfect. But in our actual life it is one of the hardest things for us to accept that we are not perfect. Sounds strange? Sounds untrue? See how many excuses we come up when others point out our shortcomings. We will probably say, “Oh, I acted because of this and because of that. Can’t you see where I am coming from? I am sure that you will do the same thing if you were in my place.” We usually do not accept our shortcomings. In knowledge we know we are not perfect. In practice we all want to play the role of the Lord.

**Fourthly, We all should respond as the one leper did: glorify God at the feet of Jesus with hearts of thankfulness and gratitude.** Glorifying God and to be thankful for others exalt God and others instead of us. So we don’t want to do so in our sinful nature.

Our inner leprosy is to glorify ourselves. In knowledge we want to glorify God. But in action we want to glorify ourslves.

We can glorify God with thanksgiving. **Psalm 69:30** reads, “**I will praise God’s name in song** **and glorify him with thanksgiving.”**

Even the nine lepers could be thankful in their knowledge. But if they do not show their thanks in their lives, their knowledge could make them proud. They became proud because they will think, “Well, at least we know in knowledge we are thankful. We are not so bad. We know there are so many people who do not know they should be thankful even in knowledge”

**Fifthly, many are blind to God’s abundant blessings.** Many of us are blind to many blessings from God, and this can be one cause of our ingratitude. For example, there is a story of a man who was lost in the woods. He was afraid for his life. So he prayed to God. Later, a friend asked him, “So did God answer your prayer?“ The man replied, “Oh, no!  Before God has a chance, a guide came along and showed me the way out”. Like this man many are blind to God’s daily blessings in their lives.

Many complain about God’s blessings. Many complain that their wives make the same food all the time, not realizing that many would gladly exchange places with them in order to eat anything that day.

Others complain about their jobs, while others pray and would be grateful to have any job. Still others complain about not having enough money, forgetting they use their money in their entertainment and the amount they used could be more than yearly income of people in some parts of the world.

**God blesses us far more than we realize and far more than we deserve. How should we respond then?** We should give thanks.

Today we learned the reason why we should be thankful. We should be thankful because everything comes from God. We should be thankful because we believe God’s goodness. We should be thankful because it is our response toward God’s blessings.

One word: Where are the other nine?