

Part 61: Disease, Distance and Doxology

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Have you ever been caught off guard by your emotional response to something? My wife often calls me a robot at my lack of human response to things. However, the older I get, the more I'm encountering these fancy things you call emotions. What most of you processed and learned how to manage when you were in Jr. High, I'm encountering in my mid-thirties and it makes for some odd moments.

There are times where I'll be watching a movie with my family and there will be a song that comes on where the whole cast, despite their trials, problems and differences, join in a song—and for some reason, I'll just start crying and I don't know why.

Today's story in the book of Luke includes a similar type of response. As ten men are healed, one man has what seems to be the most odd and out of place emotional response. As a whole world was opened up to these men, one turned it all down because of a profound turn of his emotions. While his response didn't make sense to the others who were healed, and it may not make sense to you as you heard the story, Jesus wants us to consider how we too might be like this man—not primarily by calling us to do what the Samaritan leper did, but by showing us what the Samaritan leper believed.

This is going to be our main point this morning, **When Jesus is the source of our salvation he becomes the subject of our adoration.** Our text today shows us ten men who sought mercy, but one who encountered it in a profound way. We are going to examine the nature of that mercy this morning and what we will see is this: **Jesus' mercy is: to be sought after, cleansing, stupefying, and scandalous.**

Now Luke's gospel is set up geographically, it flows towards Jerusalem, that is, towards the cross. It is on this road that we encounter our text today: Luke tells us **(11-12)**, "On the way to Jerusalem (as) he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance."

Now don't rush past these little markers—because what we see here is Jesus being interrupted on his way to something profoundly and emotionally important.

One poet commented on the pace of our modern lives. He says this: **"The great tragedy of speed as an answer to the complexities and responsibilities of existence is that very soon we cannot recognize anything or anyone who is not traveling at the same velocity as we are...Soon we begin to suffer a form of amnesia, caused by the blurred vision of velocity itself."**

I love that line, "the blurred vision of velocity." Here is Jesus, who is on his way to the most important task the world will ever know. We already know that his soul is distressed and preoccupied with the anguish that awaited him as he would die for the sins of the world.

But this Jesus, our Jesus, is encountering ten men whom the world had forgotten—blurred by the velocity of life—but they are ten men Jesus will not forget. Here we see the heart of Jesus Christ and we begin to understand why these men approach Jesus and ask him for something which is a part of his very nature: Mercy

This is our first point this morning. **Jesus' mercy is to be sought after.**

Luke tells us in verse **13** that these men, who stood at a distance, "lifted up their voices saying, 'Jesus, master, have mercy on us.'"

Wrapped up in this request for mercy is the men's awareness of two things. First, they knew that Jesus was a special sort of master who had the ability to give a special sort of mercy (*master* is unique in Luke). Secondly this call for mercy communicates what they knew about themselves. They were the ones in need. They were the ones with the problem, and Jesus was the one with the solution.

What was their problem? Well, chiefly it was that they all had leprosy. Leprosy was a skin disease which would cause massive sores on your flesh. Your skin would often begin to rot off of your own body causing immense and unending pain. Many of know how off-putting it is to get a small blister on your heel from hiking, or a minor burn on your hand while cooking. But imagine that to be all over your body and know that neither time nor medicine would ever cause the pain to stop. That's what it was physically like to be a leper.

But because of the highly contagious nature of leprosy there was an added relational pain. As part of God's healthcare program, the law dictated that lepers were to be sent outside the camp, and outside of the community until they were declared clean and could reenter.

In Leviticus 13 we read that the leper had to dress in a distinct way so that people knew to stay away from them. They were to wear torn clothes, not cut their hair, cover their face and cry out, "unclean, unclean," when they came near another person. Leviticus 13:46 says that "their dwelling will be outside the camp."

They are outsiders, that's why Luke tells us they stood at a distance and called out. They knew they were in need, and they knew Jesus was the only one who could help them. Because their pain was obvious, so was their need.

The same is true for us. We will never cry out to Jesus unless we see our own problem. We will never seek out Jesus or his mercy if we don't feel we have any need or use for it. But in God's providence, since page three of the Bible, every discomfort, every pain, every hardship you feel is a reminder of our deep need for mercy.

We need mercy because we are sinners. These lepers came because they had a physical blemish which was devastating. We come to Jesus because we have a spiritual blemish which is even more gruesome, more deadly and more dangerous to a community. Paul tells us in Titus 3:3 that all of us were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

That's far more dangerous than any condition of the skin. The condition of the heart is more dangerous not only because it's more deadly, but because it's more disguised. We can see a leper, but we often can't see our own sin. But just like these men, anyone who comes to Jesus must seek him because they know they need his healing touch. They need him to cleanse them.

That's what Jesus called these men to do. Look at **verse 14**, "When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

Here we see a glimpse into how desperately these men were looking for mercy.

My wife was watching "Little House on the Prairie," with my kids the other day and in one scene there was a band of Native Americans on horseback with war drums that approached the house. The mom said to the girls, "Go get into bed." And immediately, the girls went.

My wife turned to my kids and said, "Why can't you obey like that?" It was funny because we know why they obeyed so immediately there, without any questions. Because they sensed the danger that was at hand. At this point, they didn't care if it didn't really make sense or not, they were driven by a need.

The commands Jesus gave these men would have made no sense to you, me, or even to them apart from their need. They weren't cleansed when Jesus told them this. Nothing about their reality was any different. They could still look at one another and know that as soon as they approached the town people would stare at them and the priest would certainly reject them. But despite that, they went.

Why? Because they needed mercy. They had reached the end of themselves. And Luke tell us in verse 14 that as they went they were cleansed.

Here is our second point this morning: **Jesus' mercy is cleansing.**

As these men obeyed Jesus and left, they were cleansed. Once unclean in physical, visible, smell-able ways—they were cleansed.

Can you imagine what that was like? What would it have felt like to be healed from a disease like that in a moment? Did they see each other's wounds seal themselves up? Did the pace of their walk increase as their feet no longer hurt at every step?

Notice the words Luke and Jesus use. Once this work was called a healing, but twice it was called a cleansing. Why is that distinct? Because the miracle was so powerful that these men knew when they went to the priest in the temple there declaration of "clean" was never in doubt.

Jesus still abided by the law, he sent these men to the priests which was what needed to happen for them to be returned to society. But the law, and ordinary priests, can only declare something clean. They can't make anything clean.

But Jesus, the great and true high priest made them clean. Nothing can cleanse us from our sins but the mercy we seek through faith in Jesus Christ.

A few weeks ago I was sharing the gospel with a friend who said that such ideas of transformation, new life and resurrection sound like merely a fable. This past weekend I stood in a graveyard surrounded by buried bones and preached that one day death will lose its teeth forever. The whole of our reality tells us that can't be true.

But things stop being fables when they prove themselves to be true. And here, these men were truly healed by the same man who would himself truly rise out of the grave in resurrection glory.

Friends, there really is power in the mercy of Jesus. But you've got to respond to it. You've got to feel a little bit foolish in following it because it doesn't make sense from our own understanding.

There really is power here. If you feel trapped in sin, Jesus really does change us. His mercy and your faith combine to really produce change. It really produces hope.

How can you be confident that it will change you? Because just as Jesus told these men to "Go and show yourselves to the priests," Paul says this to us in **Romans 12:1**.

Go and present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. And by what posture do we do all of this? By the mercy of God.

Friends, do you realize you have no more of a shot to find cleaning, community and redemption on your own than a leper does of changing his own skin. We need Jesus' mercy. We need a heart which cries out for cleaning through faith, and when we do that, we are made new. We are restored. We are pardoned. We are cleansed. Have you experienced this?

If you have, consider our third point this morning: **Jesus' mercy is stupefying.**

That word "stupefy" is not merely remnant of the world of Harry Potter. It is a word commonly used in old English. One that Noah Webster defined in 1828 as, "rendering something as extremely dull or insensible" giving as an example, "the stupefying virtues of opium."

To be stupefied is to be made insensible--out of your right mind. But here we see a man made stupid to the things of the world by the rich gratitude he had towards Jesus.

Remember what just happened. Here we have men who have been cut off from their family. At best they have been seen from a distance by friends or family, but even in their gazing they would have looked indistinguishable. A hug, an embrace, a kiss would have brought with it searing pain in their flesh.

At worst, these men have been forgotten, scorned, feared and neglected.

But now, Jesus cleansed them, he healed them. What stood between them and their family, them and their return to a life they only dreamed of was finally removed! What would you do if your biggest hurdle in life were removed? What would you do if your disease was cured? What would you do if your debts were paid? What would you do if what awaited in front of you was the life you had always hoped for?

Well, we see what one man did with all of that on the table. **Luke 17:15**, "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks."

The grammar of the text is bit vague. It says that "when he saw he was healed." While we don't know how far or how long it was from Jesus' command to go, what we do know is that when it would have been easiest, when it would have been the least painful, when he would have been the strongest to run faster back towards the things of the world—he ran back to Jesus.

One commentator said, **"The nine others were already healed and hastening to the priests, that they might be restored to the society of men, and their life in the world: but the first thoughts of the Samaritan are turned to his deliverer. He had forgotten all, in the sense of God's mercy and of his own unworthiness."** (John Burgon)

If we are honest with ourselves, how many times do we pursue Jesus in order to get what we need to get back to our own lives? How many times is Jesus merely a tool for our own ideas of what the ideal life should be with family, community and financial security?

The text right before this showed us servants who said to their master, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what is our duty." But here we see that Christian duty is also Christian delight! It was not the master who called the servants unworthy, but the servants themselves as they gazed at the unparalleled privilege they had of serving the master.

This man's return was no obligatory thankfulness. Notice how Luke describes this in the text (15), he **"turned back, praising god with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks."**

What took hold of this man's heart, in contrast to the other nine, was a reflex of humble, reorienting, praise-filled gratitude. This man knew three things. He knew the reality of who he was as a leper. He knew the reality he now had access to as a clean person. And he knew the man who stood in the middle. And if that man was the means of getting from one point to another, from death to life, from leprosy to community, then the only response was gratitude.

In fact Jesus goes as far to say that it was only this man who was in his right mind. Luke tells us (vs. 17-18) "Where not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

We talk about "thankless" jobs all the time. They guy who comes and scrubs out those porta-potties, that's a thankless job. The person who raises those half dozen chickens that go into my platter of chicken wings, that's a thankless job. The linemen who tend to the utility lines in subzero temperatures so you can have heat, that's a thankless job.

You would think that a man who just healed you from a terminal and incurable disease with nothing but his word would not be a thankless job. But here's the problem of human hearts isn't it? We exchange mercy for merit, underserved grace for a deserved reward.

We can debate what happened to these men--Did they have the same amount of faith as the one who returned? Did they receive the same mercy as the one who returned? But why? It makes no difference. The point Jesus is making to us is that we should be like the one who comes back.

We should be the ones who never forget who we were, what Jesus has done, and who we now are on account of that.

When the "blurred vision of velocity" settles in your mind, the clarity and sobriety of humble gratitude must follow. And it must follow because the more we think about mercy, the better it gets.

This is our final point this morning: **Jesus' mercy is scandalous.**

So far I've sort of glossed over this really important feature here haven't I? Three times Luke brings it to our attention. First he says that Jesus was passing between Samaria and Galilee. For those who have been walking with us, the Samaritans and the Jews were enemies. They hated one another.

The Samaritans were seen as the compromising dirty half-bloods who intermarried with the Gentile foreigners. The debate here was not only racial, but it was ethical and spiritual.

But leprosy, like sin, knows no racial bounds. In this group were both Jews and Samaritans.

Jesus draws this point out in verse 18 when he says, "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

The mercy Jesus showed was universal to both the Jews and the Samaritan lepers, but only the Samaritan came back. Perhaps that's because the Samaritan, more than the Jews, better understood the nature of mercy.

The Samaritan knew there was nothing in him worthy of Jesus' mercy. He had no right to the Messiah's power. He had nothing in him deserving of Jesus' promise. So when the healing happened he was overwhelmed with the scandalous grace that saved a wretch like him. J.C. Ryle says, **"Thankfulness is a flower which will never bloom well excepting upon a root of deep humility."**

And notice what Jesus says to him in **verse 19**, "And he said to him, 'Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.'"

Here's the real thrust of this story. This man was already cleansed. Luke says so in verse 14, Jesus says so in verse 17. But here Jesus says, "Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well."

It is similar to the command he gave everyone in vs. 14 when he said, "go and show." But it's distinct because the basis of it is different. Jesus says, "rise and go because your faith has made you well." That verb isn't the same word for cleansing in verse 14 or 17, and neither is it the word for healing in verse 15. It's simply the Greek word for "salvation." It can literally read, "you have been saved."

Saved? Saved from what? Saved from whatever blinded those other men to the heart of gratitude. Saved from the blurred vision of velocity. Saved from praiselessness. Saved from leprosy. Saved from death itself. Why? How?

Because his faith has made him well.

You see the miracle of this text is not that ten men were saved from a devastating disease, but that one man was saved from a devastating distance. The man's greatest problem was not how he stood, with leprosy, but where he stood, at a distance. He didn't need to be restored by healing, he needed to be restored to the healer.

That's the reality that radically reoriented his emotions and sent him back. He no longer stood at a distance, he didn't wait for the priest to clear him, he threw himself, cleansed by faith face first on the feet of Jesus. The first touch he wanted to know was the only touch capable to save. Before he was embraced by the world he would be embraced by the one who made it.

This story isn't about who was healed from leprosy. All of them were. This is a story about a man who refused to present himself to a human priest for worldly acceptance before he presented himself to the great high priest out of deep adoration.

There are eleven, not ten healings in this text. Ten men were healed from leprosy, one man was healed from blindness. His eyes were opened to see the true nature of Jesus, the true reality of his sin and out of that reality the emotions and affections flowed as naturally as the streams of a river.

Jesus is doing something here which we cannot miss. He is attaching in a rather scandalous way our experience of faith with some sort of affection.

Jonathan Edwards says this: **"If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart. The reason why men are not affected by such infinitely great, important, glorious, and wonderful things, as they often hear and read of in the word of God, is, undoubtedly, because they are blind; if they were not so, it would be impossible, and utterly inconsistent with human nature, that their hearts should be otherwise than strongly impressed, and greatly moved by such things."**

Our problem is greater than we can imagine which makes the redemption of Jesus the wave of deepest affection.

That's the point of Jesus' message. If you understand what happens when in faith you cry out to Jesus for mercy, then you must return to him in praise. We can't be unmoved when we understand this, but instead we approach the feet of Jesus with natural adoration.

When Jesus is the source of our salvation he is the subject of our adoration.

So what do we do with this? How do we develop in ourselves a spirit of adoration, praise and thanksgiving?

I can think of three things from this text.

First, **Take Account**. This man took account of his leprous flesh, and it drove him to Jesus. Take a look at your heart this week, and let it lead you to the cross. Look your sin, your failings, and your problems in the face and realize there is one who stops for you.

Second, in light of that, **Praise Him**. With your roommate, with your spouse, maybe with your community group this week, read Ephesians 1 and write down all that we have received in Jesus' mercy. Let that lead you to praise him. Today, as we prepare to sing, praise him. Music and song are a gift from God that help us practice doxology—so do that today.

And lastly, **Fall in Humble Reliance Upon Him**. We see a man overcome with emotions who ran back to Jesus. There are two deep truths here. The first is, that we are not saved by our emotions. But, people who are saved by Jesus, do in a way fitting with their own personality and the weight of their redemption, respond with increase affections to Jesus.

So if you are one who struggles with that, then do what this man did: cry out for mercy and throw yourself at Jesus feet. Realize that there's nothing you could do to save yourself. Ask him to bring to you a heart of praise, and know that because this Jesus is not inconvenienced by our woes, that he will slow to help us because he is faithful to heal us.