



Message Transcript: 9th October 2022

Faithfulness comes with remembering with gratitude

Main verses:

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

Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

(Luke 17:17-19)

Main Point:

It is helpful to visualise today's Gospel passage, only then are we faced with the faith of the lepers and the faithfulness of the one who returned to thank Jesus for his healing. Will we be like the one who returned to give thanks? Would we, also, be prepared to walk in faithful obedience based entirely on Jesus' word, before the answer to our prayers had come?

Intro |

Today I'd like us to step onto the dusty streets and imagine that we are one of the disciples who are following Jesus as he travels from town to town, teaching about the Kingdom of God and healing people.

We knew that our journey with Jesus was getting closer and closer to Jerusalem, for we were walking the road which borders Samaria and Galilee. Every day the danger of being one of Jesus' followers became more intense. None of us thought it is a good idea to head towards Jerusalem – but who argues with the Messiah?

We begin to catch a glimpse of a village and hear the cries of ten lepers sitting a way off the road. Oh my are they a sad sight. Most have crutches, others are leaning on their friend, so they hobble along. Apart from small glimpses of skin, most of their bodies are covered in bandages.

As they get nearer the stench is almost unbearable.

'Why are they here?' one of the disciples asks. 'They shouldn't be this close to the road.'

'I suppose they heard about the other leper being healed and are desperate for the same. Jesus clearly told him He was always willing to heal them.' (Luke 5:12-15)

'After all, if I was in such a desperate state as they are, I would travel for miles to be healed.'

'Desperate people do desperate things.'

It didn't take long before we decipher what the ten were yelling.

Instead of warning us of their unclean state (Leviticus 13:45-46), they were shouting,

"Jesus Master, have mercy on us." (Luke 17:13)

The closer they got to us, the more worried we became. I mean, while it was unlikely Jesus would get infected by the disease these guys had, we could – and that would mean the end of our lives as we know it.

- No more family.
- No more job.
- No more worshipping at the temple.
- No more contact with anyone, of any kind.

If we got leprosy, we would be destitute – slowly dying without any hope of life returning to normal.

Thankfully Jesus called out to them,

"Go and show yourselves to the priests."

We knew why Jesus told them to do that. The local priests were responsible for declaring whether or not you could worship with everyone else at the temple, and if you could re-join your family, friends and society. If the priest announced that they were healed, their nightmare was over – they were back!

We all stood still and waited. We wondered what they would do.

Now, I'd like to pause for a moment and sit in that space of decision.

As I visualised myself, not as one of the disciples, but as one of the lepers, boy was I confronted by what they did.

All ten of them turned, in obedience to Jesus' words, and walked towards the temple.

To tell you the truth, I'm not convinced I would have responded the same way.

Would I have been so convinced of the power of Jesus' words, that I turn away from him, following his instructions, even while my disease remained glaringly evident?

I think I would have been tempted to wait at Jesus' feet, or at least follow along behind him, not wanting to let him out of my sight until I saw that the healing had manifested.

Would I take him at his word? Would I turn and walk in faith, trusting that whatever he said would come to pass?

I don't know another picture of what 'walking by faith and not by sight' looks like as what these ten lepers were prepared to do.

In order for this miracle to happen these men had to start walking in faith BEFORE their bodies had changed one tiny bit.

And it took courage and faith to walk towards the village temple – remember, they weren't allowed to be around other people, let alone the priests.

But is not this exactly like the journey of faith, which God calls us to walk - in expectation and confidence that God's Word is powerful enough to fulfil what he has promised, BEFORE anything at all has changed.

When we walk by faith and not by sight, it changes our language.

The faithful doesn't say, "Lord, as soon as there's enough money, I'll follow your instructions."

Or, "Lord, if you'll just solve this issue in my family, then I'll joyfully praise you."

Or, "Lord, when I hear a good report from the doctor, then I'll know you're doing a work of healing and restoration."

No! We are called to praise and thank God BEFORE the answer comes.

As I talk about this kind of faith, there is a song that comes to mind, inspired by the words of the Prophet Habakkuk,

*Though the fig tree does not blossom and there be no fruit on the vine
The produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food
Though the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stall
Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, Yet will I rejoice in the Lord
I will joy in the God of my salvation, God the Lord is my strength.
(Habakkuk 3:17-18)*

Saints, this is the walk of faith! If you praised God only on the good days, only in the best of circumstances, it would not be faith at all.

And what is the result of their walking by faith?

Luke meticulously reported *"and as they went, they were cleansed."* (Luke 17:14b)

Their journey towards the temple wasn't just a few metres.

As they walked a hand reappeared and tingled with life. The leg of another was back, healthy, whole, complete. Bandages began to reveal skin which had tiny brown hairs rather than snow white. One looked at the other, another looked at the rest, and the screaming started.

Cheers turned into an exuberant dance. We saw them run as fast as they could, on their newly strong limbs, toward the temple a few kilometres away - their nightmare was finally over.

But then, one of the disciples, nudges you and says, "Hey here is one coming back".

You see him fall onto his knees and shout praises to God in a loud voice. (v15)

Each of us looked at each other. 'Boy, this guy is thankful.'

"Yeh, you whisper back, "I suppose he figured, if he used his loud voice to express his pain and agony, warning everyone of his presence, he could use his loud voice to praise God, telling everyone of his healing.'

I think we can learn a lot from this thankful man.

In the midst of his celebration, he returned to Jesus.

He reversed his steps, put his family on hold, put the priest on hold, and came back to the one who brought about his celebration.

His thankfulness led him straight into worship.

And boy, did that turn out to be important!

Jesus even seemed surprised when he said,

"Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" (v17)

'We knew he was a Samaritan', one disciple whispered.

'I wondered why he was the one who remembered to return?'

'Yeh! Why didn't the others come back? I mean, Jesus totally changed their lives.'

'Well, I suppose, the others were only focussed on the priest's authority to declare them clean; they forgot it was Jesus who had the authority to clean them.'

You know, we can be like that as well. We can be so desperate for God's answer while the crisis remains, but as soon as all is well again, we forget about our desperation and return to life as normal.

How easily we can forget to fill in that praise report and omit to tell everyone it was God's power that brought us through our season of difficulty.

Now, before we finish, I found myself asking a question.

We know that all ten lepers were healed, so why did Jesus say, that the faith of the Samaritan had made him well? (Luke 17:19)

I found it interesting that the word for 'well' used here, is different from the other words used previously.

It's not a medical word, rather it is the word, "so-dzo," which means, "saved."

When Paul described what would happen to a person who publicly professed Jesus as Lord and Saviour, he used this same word.

"... If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved [so-dzo!] (Romans 10:9-10).

So, to this man, the only one who remembered to return to give thanks, Jesus not only pronounced complete physical healing, he also pronounced spiritual wholeness.

Why? Because he acknowledged the healing had come from Jesus, as God's anointed King.

Finally, before we apply this encounter to our own lives, there is one other lesson I think we should notice.

God's saving grace, even though it is extended to all, is not received by all.

Only those who are grateful for what Jesus has done for them, receive the fullness of his blessing and acceptance.

Among the ten healed lepers, only the Samaritan heard the comforting words, "*your faith has saved you.*" (Luke 17:19 Young's Literal Translation)

Application | Well, this passage is so easy to apply to our lives.

Will you be the one who is prepared to take Jesus at his word, confident that God's Word has the power to bring to pass whatever he has said?

Will you be the one who lives their life from the empowerment that comes from being filled with gratitude for God's goodness?

Finally, will praise and thankfulness be continually on our lips?

Let us make a daily commitment to be the one who returns to give thanks.