The Story of the Ten Lepers

Surprised by Joy
Luke wrote his Gospel “in order to attract and win to Christianity cultured Greek readers like Theophilus, to whom it is dedicated” (Metzger).

“Luke includes details which describe the graciousness of Jesus’ personal character and his concern for people of all races and classes. The universal aspects of his mission are emphasized” (Metzger).

Luke’s Gospel is not fiction. The events described happened in time and space during the lifetime of Jesus of Nazareth.

Luke begins his story with these words: “And it came about...” (i.e., the characters and events recorded in Luke 17:11-19 are real).
“The purpose of observation is to saturate yourself thoroughly with the content of a passage. Like a sponge, absorb everything before you. Learn to be exact and accurate in your observations. Not everything you read will be of equal value; therefore, in the process you also have to learn to discern what is noteworthy and what is not” (Oletta Wald).
Agassiz’s Greatest Contribution at Harvard

“The ability to see is a developed process. Louis Agassiz, the renowned nineteenth-century naturalist of Harvard, was asked on one occasion, ‘What was your greatest contribution, scientifically?’ His answer: “I have taught men and women to observe.”
“And it came about while He was on the way to Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten leprous men, who stood at a distance; and they raised their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ And when He saw them, He said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And it came about that as they were going, they were cleansed.
Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answered and said, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine – where are they? Were none found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?’ And He said to him, ‘Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well.’”

- Luke 17:11-19
All Three Synoptics: Jesus Went To Judea

• “And it came about that when Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee, and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan” (Mt. 19:1).

• “And rising up, He went from there to the region of Judea, and beyond the Jordan; and crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them” (Mk. 10:1).

• “And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51).
• The Greek, in literal translation, tells us that Jesus was going “through the middle of” Galilee and Samaria. However, this does not mean that Jesus was going, first, through the middle of Galilee and then, through the middle of Samaria.

• Jesus was traveling between Galilee and Samaria, “along the border where they meet” (Lenski). Hendriksen agrees: “Probably along the border between, that border being indeed ‘in the middle,’ with Galilee to the north, and Samaria to the south. Jesus was traveling this middle line....He was probably taking the road which near Bethshean crosses the Jordan into Perea.”
Jesus came to an unnamed village and saw ten leprous men standing at a distance. Nine were Jewish and one was a Samaritan (vss. 16,18).
Old Testament Quarantine Laws

• “The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Lev. 13:45-46).

• “Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead. You shall put them out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell” (Num. 5:2-3).
What Is Leprosy?

• Leprosy is a slowly progressing, chronic infection caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae*. According to American Leprosy Missions, “it causes an infection that affects the skin, destroys nerves and can also cause problems in the eyes and nose.” Leprosy is also called Hansen’s disease, named after Dr. Armauer Hansen of Norway who was the first to see the leprosy germ under a microscope in 1873.

• Fingers and toes do not fall off with leprosy. However, the disease may result in a lack of ability to feel pain leading to the loss of these extremities due to repeated injuries or infection due to unnoticed wounds.
Images of Leprosy

Miriam (Martha Scott) and Tirzah (Cathy O’Donnell) with Leprosy
From Ben Hur (1959)
“She and Tirzah were – LEPERS! Possibly the reader does not know all the word means. Let him be told it with reference to the Law of that time, only a little modified in this.

“‘These four are accounted as dead – the blind, the leper, the poor, and the childless.’ Thus the Talmud.

“That is, to be a leper was to be treated as dead – to be excluded from the city as a corpse; to be spoken to by the best beloved and most loving only at a distance; to dwell with none but lepers; to be utterly unprivileged; to be denied the rites of the Temple and the synagogue; to go about in rent garments and with covered mouth, except when
crying, ‘Unclean, unclean!’ to find home in the wilderness or in abandoned tombs; to become a materialized specter of Hinnom and Gehenna; to be at all times less a living offence to others than a breathing torment to self; afraid to die, yet without hope except in death....”

“Slowly, steadily, with horrible certainty, the disease spread, after a while bleaching their heads white, eating holes in their lips and eyelids, and covering their bodies with scales; then it fell to their throats shrilling their voices, and to their joints, hardening the tissues and cartilages – slowly, and, as the mother well knew, past remedy, it was
affecting their lungs and arteries and bones, at each advance making the sufferers more and more loathsome; and so it would continue till death, which might be years before them.”

**The Miracle**

“There is a wonderful man,” Amrah continued, “who has power to cure you. He speaks a word, and the sick are made well, and even the dead come to life. I have come to take you to him.”

“This morning he will pass by on his way to the city. See! The day is at hand. Take the food here – eat, and let us go.”
“Who is he?” she asked.
“A Nazarene.”
“Who told you about him?”
“Judah...He was traveling with him, and heard the lepers call, and saw them go away well. First there was one man; then there were ten; and they were all made whole.”
“This must be the Messiah!”
A stranger: “Stay thou here then; or, as there is a multitude with him, take thy stand by the rock yonder, the white one under the tree; and as he goeth by, fail not to call him; call, and fear not. If thy faith but equal thy knowledge, he will hear thee though all the heavens thunder. I go to tell Israel, assembled in and about the city, that he is at hand, and to make ready to receive him. Peace to thee and thine, woman.”

“Amrah,” she asked, “when Judah spoke of the healing of the ten, in what words did he say they called to the Nazarene?”

“Either they said, ‘Lord have mercy upon us,’ or ‘Master, have mercy.’”
“Only that?”

“No more that I heard.”

“Yet it was enough,” the mother added, to herself.

When Jesus passes by: “O Master, Master! Thou seest our need; thou canst make us clean. Have mercy upon us – mercy!”

“Believest thou I am able to do this?” he asked.

“Thou art he of whom the prophets spoke – thou art the Messiah!” she replied. “Woman,” he said, “great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”
“There was first in the hearts of the lepers a freshening of the blood; then it flowed faster and stronger, thrilling their wasted bodies with an infinitely sweet sense of painless healing. Each felt the scourge going from her; their strength revived; they were returning to be themselves. Directly, as if to make the purification complete, from body to spirit the quickening ran, exalting them to a very fervor of ecstasy. The power possessing them to this good end was not nearly that of a draught of swift and happy effect; yet it was unlike and superior in that its healing and cleansing were absolute, and not merely a delicious consciousness while in progress, but the planting, growing, and maturing all at once of a recollection so singular and so holy that the simple thought of it should be of itself, ever after, a formless yet perfect thanksgiving.”
The Plea for Mercy

• “They raised their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’” (Lk. 17:13).

• *Kyrie eleison*: “Lord, have mercy! Take pity on us!”

• The first thing the lepers did was to pray. They were desperate.

• “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive *mercy* and may find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).
Jesus Cleansed Them

• “And when He saw them, He said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And it came about that as they were going, they were cleansed” (Lk. 17:14).

• Jesus did not touch them, but simply told them to follow the Law as prescribed in Lev. 14:1f: “Show yourselves to the priests.”

• When the priests declared them cleansed, they would be restored to society and to fellowship with the general population.

• Should they go? The lepers believed Jesus had the power to heal them, so they believed His promise and were healed along the way.
• **Wilhelmus á Brakel**: “The goodness of God is the loveliness, benign character, sweetness, friendliness, kindness, and generosity of God.”

• **Stephen Charnock**: “Pure and perfect goodness is only the royal prerogative of God; goodness is a choice perfection of the Divine nature. This is the true and genuine character of God; he is good, he is goodness, good in himself, good in his essence, good in the highest degree, possessing whatsoever is comely, excellent, desirable; the highest good, because first good: whatsoever is perfect goodness, is God; whatsoever is truly goodness in any creature, is a resemblance of God.”
Understanding God’s Goodness

• **John M. Frame:** “In a broad sense, goodness is conduct (by man or by God himself) that measures up to God’s standards. As such, it is more or less synonymous with *righteousness*....Goodness is, first of all, God’s own character. It is an attribute of God himself.”

• **R.C. Sproul:** “God’s goodness refers both to His character and His behavior. His actions proceed from and flow out of His being. He acts according to what He is. Just as a corrupt tree cannot bear incorrupt fruit, neither can an incorrupt God produce corrupt fruit.”
The Similarity of the Ten: William Hendriksen

• All were afflicted with the dreadful disease;
• All were determined to do something about it;
• All had heard about Jesus, and believed that he might be able to cure them, at the very least would take pity on them;
• All appeal to Jesus, acknowledging him as Master or Rabbi;
• All, in obedience to Christ’s command, proceed on their way to the priests;
• All are healed.
The Return of the One

• The Samaritan Leper turned back, “glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him” (vss. 15-16).

• He publicly acknowledged that Jesus was the one who had cleansed him.

• He knew that no earthly power had cured him, and so he glorified God with a loud voice, fell at Jesus’ feet, and thanked him over and over again.

• The text reminds us that he was a Samaritan. He is a changed man – by the love of Jesus, a Jew.
“And Jesus answered and said, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine – where are they? Were none found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?’” (vss. 17-18).

In the Greek text, it reads: “But the nine – where?”

Jesus is grieved that the nine refused to return to thank Him.

Is it possible that the one had an argument with the nine over their healing? Is it possible that the Samaritan tried to convince them to return with them, but they refused?

Jesus is deeply concerned that His Father did not receive glory from the very men whom he had cleansed.

“The Most High is kind to ungrateful and evil men” (Lk. 6:35).
The Leper’s Complete Healing

• “And He said to him, ‘Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well’” (vs. 19).

• Jesus tells the healed leper to get up and go to the priests to be legally pronounced clean so he could resume his fellowship with other people.

• “The nine lepers were cleansed. But because they were ungodly and forgot God’s grace, their ingratitude infected and contaminated their healthiness. And so they do not receive the advantage that they should. Therefore faith alone sanctifies God’s gifts to us and makes them pure, and when they are used lawfully they turn out to our salvation....The Samaritan was saved by his faith” (John Calvin).
What Kind of Healing?

“The bond between physical and its spiritual aspect is illustrated by the healing of the ten lepers. All ten were ‘cleansed’ and ‘healed’ (Lk. 17:14f). To the one, a Samaritan who returned to express his gratitude, Jesus said, ‘Your faith has saved you’ (Lk. 17:19). These are the same words used elsewhere of healing. Are we to suppose that the other nine were not really healed?....In view of the fact that these same words are clearly used of ‘spiritual’ salvation (Lk. 7:50), we may agree with those expositors who see a greater blessing bestowed on the Samaritan than on the nine. His ‘salvation’ or wholeness was more than physical healing. It implied a sound spiritual state” (George Eldon Ladd).
“God’s generosity in bestowing natural blessings is acclaimed in Psalm 145: ‘The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made....The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing’ (vss. 9,15,16; cf. Acts 14:17). The psalmist’s point is that, since God controls all that happens in His world, every meal, every pleasure, every possession, every bit of sun, every night’s
sleep, every moment of health and safety, everything else that sustains and enriches life, is a divine gift. And how abundant these gifts are! ‘Count your blessings, name them one by one,’ urges the children’s chorus, and anyone who seriously begins to list his natural blessings alone will soon feel the force of the next line – ‘and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.’ But the mercies of God on the natural level, however abundant, are overshadowed by the greater mercies of spiritual redemption. When the singers of Israel summoned the people to give thanks to God because ‘he is good: for his mercy endureth forever,’ it was usually of redemptive mercies that they were thinking...”
Five Biblical Principles

• By examining the story of the ten lepers, we are reminded that developing the **habit of thankfulness** needs to be a part of our daily lives.

• Like the leper, we should return to the Lord with gratitude when He does **extraordinary things** on our behalf, including saving us.

• Our gratitude to God will almost certainly be in **proportion to our sense of feeling unworthily blessed.**

• Gratitude is first and foremost **our duty**, whether we are emotionally invested or not. “In everything give thanks” involves the volitional side of our being and demonstrates that we trust Him and His Word.

• Gratitude is to be directed to God for “all things” and is an acknowledgement that **God knows and does all things well for His glory and for our good.**
“I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”

“The worst moment for an atheist is when he feels a profound sense of gratitude and has no one to thank.”