

Luke Chapter 17 v 11 - 19

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Let's turn together in God's Word to Luke and chapter 17. Hopefully you've already got that up in your Bibles or on your laptops or on your phones.

And we're going to carry on from verse 11. Luke 17, verse 11. Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, Jesus, Master, have pity on us.

When he saw them, he said, Go, show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, Were not all ten cleansed?

[1 : 10] 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. Our dear friend Roger Carswell has written a tract, especially for the corona pandemic.

And in it, he makes mention of one of my very favourite comic book heroes, Asterix. Because in an Asterix story called Asterix on the Chariot Race, there appears a charioteer who's named Coronavirus.

The term Coronavirus was first coined back in the 1930s. It was to describe a group of viruses which were particularly causing difficulty for breathing, for poultry and chickens.

Coronavirus has become a word that we are all too familiar with. But other words, other phrases have come into our everyday language. COVID-19, PPE, social distancing.

[2 : 25] And like Coronavirus, social distancing is not something entirely new to the world. When we turn here in Luke and chapter 17, we find ten men practicing social distancing as they keep a safe distance from Jesus and his disciples to prevent the spread of a terrible disease.

We're told there, as Jesus was going into the village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called. Contracting leprosy meant immediate isolation from social life.

It was the only way to protect the community. The person with leprosy had to leave their home and their family and their work and their pleasures. It was a living death, unless the disease went into remission.

In Jesus' day, the only isolation ward available was removal from the village. The only contact available then was with others who had leprosy.

This meeting between Jesus and these ten men has at its centre a vital message for us today in the midst of this Coronavirus epidemic.

[3 : 43] You see, there are only two ways that we can view the world around about us and the situations that we meet. We can either view the world with faith or without faith.

Everybody sees life through one of these two lenses. In the terrible trauma of leprosy, these ten men had a choice.

They could either seek God and his help by coming to Jesus, God's Messiah and Saviour, or they could not.

Undoubtedly, they'd heard about Jesus. Jesus had been ministering for nearly three years in and around this area of Galilee, in the northern part of Israel. They'd heard, no doubt, about how Jesus had healed the sick and even raised the dead.

And particularly what pricked their attention was the fact that Jesus had healed others who had leprosy as well. Back in Luke in chapter 5, we're told of a man who came to Jesus covered with leprosy.

[4 : 54] When he saw Jesus, he fell down on his face to the ground and begged him, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said.

Be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him. These men now had a glimmer of hope.

A mustard seed, perhaps, of faith. So when they hear that Jesus is coming to the village and news of his travelling always went ahead of him, they decide that they're going to give Jesus a try.

They're going to ask him for pity. Jesus, Master, we're told, they called out in a loud voice, have pity on us.

There's nothing specific in their prayer. They don't say, heal us, rescue us, save us. And no doubt, as they called to Jesus, there would have been some trepidation in their voice, a little bit of a tremble, afraid that Jesus might reject them, dismiss them as others had chased them away from the village.

[6 : 11] But still there's a genuine prayer. Jesus, Master. To ask for pity, or some translations use the word mercy, means to ask to be shown compassion in a time of need.

It means to recognise one's own helplessness. And that the person we're asking for pity from has the ability to make a difference to us in our suffering.

I wonder why these men hadn't met with Jesus before now. As I said, he'd been three years in the area. Perhaps they'd only just contracted leprosy recently.

Perhaps they'd hoped that it might just go away and cure itself and not be quite so serious. Perhaps they'd be quite so serious. Leprosy covered a whole multitude of different skin complaints.

Perhaps it was only now that they were really desperate. Perhaps only now, at last, they realised they had no other hope except that they should go to this miracle-working rabbi that they'd heard about.

[7 : 22] C.S. Lewis was the author of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, one of the Narnia series of books. He wrote many others as well and was a very clear Christian.

He wrote about his own sufferings, his own bereavement, in a book called The Problem of Pain. In it he says this, pain insists upon being attended to.

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

As truly terrible and heartbreaking as this present pandemic is, if we look at the world with faith in a sovereign God, then we can see that he is able to bring good for the people of this world, even through this time.

These men called out to Jesus in their pain and it was for them the beginning of faith, a journey of faith, a coming to God.

[8 : 43] Jesus replies to them in a very different way than he did to the earlier leper in Luke 5. He doesn't go towards them and touch them and speak, I'm willing to heal you. He simply gives them a command, an instruction, go show yourself to the priests.

That was the normal procedure for when a leper was cured or healed. The local priests acted as a sort of health inspector to certify that a cure had taken place or that the person was now clean and better.

Leviticus chapter 14 is a great deal of instruction about what should be done when a person has had this sort of disease or illness. It says this, these are the regulations for a diseased person.

The priest is to examine them. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, then we're told of various rituals that are to take place, certain ceremonies and sacrifices.

And then at the end, the priest pronounces the person clean or healed or well. By commanding the men to go and see the priest, Jesus is calling upon them to take a step of faith in him, in his word.

[9 : 58] He's asking them to act as if they have already been healed by him. If they did what he told them, if they obeyed his command, then it showed that they did have real faith in him to heal them.

And in fact, that's what happened. They did obey Jesus. We're told there in verse 14, when Jesus says, go show yourselves the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed.

As they obeyed Jesus and began to travel to find a priest, so while on their way, they were cleansed of their leprosy. They were completely healed. Some of us may well, in this time of suffering and pain, turn to religion for help.

I'm sure many people have done that. Perhaps you've done that yourself. Perhaps for the first time in your life, because of fear or concern or anxiety for yourself or other loved ones, you maybe started to pray.

Perhaps you've even taken that dusty Bible off the shelf or found it where it was propping up your bed. You may have stopped doing those things that you know you shouldn't be doing.

[11 : 08] Those things that you know are wrong. You've said, I'm going to try and live a good life. You've stopped swearing or watching pornography or getting drunk. The hope is that God will notice these good things that we're doing to seek his help for ourselves or our loved ones.

We expect that now he'll look upon us more favourably. He'll look upon our attempts at faithful living and reward us with protection from COVID-19 or even heal somebody who we know has got it.

This is something that many of us do when we face real trouble. This is something that we tend to find instinctively drawn towards when the chips are down.

We may begin to go to church and we might start praying and stop sinning because we think these things will earn us God's help, healing or his blessing. That's how the majority of these lepers thought as well.

How do I know that's how they thought? Because once they were healed they had no more use for Jesus. As soon as they were cured of this terrible, awful disease they went back home to their families and got on with their lives and they didn't even bother to spend just a moment in thanking Jesus for what he'd done.

[12 : 41] In coming and giving him gratitude this amazing miracle that had transformed their lives and turned their whole situation around. But isn't that the case with most of us as well?

Once God gets us through the tough time, once things become a bit easier and the finances are sorted or we get a new job or we start to feel better, as soon as we're out of trouble then we forget about God.

The vows that we made to keep coming to church or to pray or to seek him. We go back on them. We get on with life as we did before because we don't need God anymore.

C.S. Lewis in that same book spoke about how we are like airmen, as pilots or RAF men in a plane with a parachute.

We only see the use of God when we're in trouble. But there's one man who acts very differently, isn't there? One man who doesn't simply receive the blessing of Jesus, receive the good thing that Jesus did for him and then go on his way.

[13 : 52] He did something that none of the others did, we're told. Verse 15, one of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice, threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.

As soon as he realised he was healed and that Jesus had done the healing, he starts praising God and runs back to Jesus and finds him and thanks him and worships him.

That's what it is to fall at his feet, to acknowledge that he's great and worthy of praise. Yes, the others had been all healed. They gave no praise to God and they gave no worship to Jesus.

There's something else about this man as well, isn't there? We're told at the end of verse 16, and he was a Samaritan. That means a lot to the people of Jesus' day and to Jesus himself.

The Samaritans were a mixed race of people, part Jew and part Assyrian. They were counted by the real Jews, the pure Jews, as basically the scum of the earth and they would have nothing to do with them whatsoever.

[14 : 57] They were the untouchables. They even had their own form of Judaism and religion. In verse 17, Jesus asked, were not all ten cleansed?

Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner, this non-Jew? Jesus is clearly disappointed, isn't he, in the nine men who were Jews.

They had been healed. Why was he so disappointed in them? Because really, they reflected the whole attitude of the nation.

The Jewish people of Jesus' day rejected Jesus as God's chosen Messiah and Savior. They were indifferent to him. They saw the things he did, the miracles he performed and yet still they were unmoved to return to the God who had given them so many blessings.

Remember, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, we're told, in verse 11. And we know what that means as we've been going through the book of Luke. We know that he's all too aware of what awaits him there.

[16 : 11] He's told his disciples on more on occasion that he must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law and that he must be killed.

And this experience, these men's attitude towards him only cements the reality that the whole nation has no real time for the living God.

But this miracle, this cleansing of leprosy of not one or two or three or five or eight or nine but ten men is the evidence that Jesus truly is God's Saviour, God's Messiah, the one and only Son of God.

Come to the Jewish people, God's people to rescue them and to restore them to himself. The miracles that Jesus did were signs for that very purpose.

Later on in John in chapter 20 after Jesus had been raised from the dead John writes this conclusion. He said Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book that's in John's Gospel some are in Luke and Matthew some perhaps weren't even written about but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[17 : 47] They should have known. They should have realised. They should have seen but they didn't. they clearly did not have faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

They clearly did not see that he was God's appointed saviour. But there was absolutely no excuse for them not to. In verse 19 Jesus speaks finally to the Samaritan the man who had leprosy but now was cured and had come back to him and with thanksgiving and praise to God.

And Jesus' final words to this man show that he out of all the ten alone had made that vital leap of faith. That saving faith that true faith that genuine faith.

Faith that wasn't just simply for a time or for a moment or because they hoped to twist God's arm to do them good but a real faith. In our English translations we have the words of Jesus as this rise and go your faith has made you well.

But that little word well that we have in the English in its original meaning is saved you or made you whole complete. It's obvious that this one man has received from Jesus something more than simply a physical healing.

[19 : 16] He's received something much more than that. Not just a deliverance from a terrible debilitating disease but he's received eternal life. That which has made him whole that which has saved him that which has rescued him.

said dear friends our greatest need is not that we should be healthy. Our greatest need is not that we should be physically well or free from disease or illness or that we should recover from COVID-19.

Our greatest need above all else is eternal life. Eternal salvation. Spiritual life. You see all of us must die.

We can't escape that. We can't get out of that. Whatever the cause of our death. Whether it is the coronavirus. Whether it is old age. Whether it's cancer or something else that is truly terrible and death is terrible.

It's not the end of us. Writing in Hebrews in chapter 9 verse 27 we're told this startling stark truth.

[20 : 29] Every one of us is destined to die once and after that to face judgment. This present time of pain, this present time of suffering is our wake up call from God.

A wake up call to come to Jesus for the mercy that he wants to give us, for the salvation for which he died for us. Peter, once arrested in Acts chapter 4 for preaching and speaking in this way about Jesus, told those who were assembled against him this, salvation, that's eternal life, is found in no one else.

For there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved than the name of Jesus. Jesus. It's only as we entrust ourselves to Jesus as our saviour, as Jesus, as the one who can rescue us, it's only as we put our faith in him, not for a time or a moment, or simply because it makes us feel better, or we hope that it will get us what we want, it's only as we put our entire trust and faith in him, as the one who is God's saviour for us, who left heaven for us, who died and rose again for us, so that our sins might be forgiven, so that we might be pardoned, so that we might be declared right in God's eyes.

It's only through faith in him and trust in him will this pandemic that we are going through have brought about God's loving purpose and desire for your life.

You see, God does not want anyone to perish. Not just die, but perish. Perish is to be eternally cut off from God, eternally separated from his love, kindness and life.

[22 : 43] Peter writes this, God does not want any to perish but everyone to come to repentance. Repentance is like the cry of these men saying, I need you Jesus.

I know that I'm a sinner. I know that I'm cut up from God. I know that I am lost and unless you save me there is no one who can help me and I turn to you with all my heart and soul and mind.

That's what God wants us to do. That's why God is shouting and calling to us and even through me speaking to you tonight this morning whenever you're listening to this video that if you will come to Jesus as these men did and put your faith in him and act upon his word then you too will be made whole for this life and for eternity.

Let's pray together. O Lord our God we confess that you know all things.

You know all things about the world, you know all things about life and death, you know all about us. You know O Lord how we go through our lives without a care or concern or thought for you.

[24 : 09] We think of ourselves as almost indestructible we think that death will never really get us and we hope that we shall live for lives.

But Lord you know that unless you shouted us, unless you awaken us, unless you speak through the darkness of our hearts and minds, unless you speak through the walls that we've built up around ourselves to keep you out, unless you break them down, then O Lord we shall forever be lost, lost O Lord from you and lost O Lord eternally.

Thank you that you love us so much, that you are willing for us to suffer pain so that we might awaken to our desperate need, that we might awaken and call upon Jesus your Son who saves everyone who calls on him.

Lord help us not to have that partial, unreliable, useless type of belief. Help us to have that real, genuine, saving faith.

We again pray Lord for those who mourn at this time, that you would comfort them. We thank you Lord for your goodness and faithfulness, that Lord all those who trust in you can weep with hope, knowing that they shall be with you one day, and that those that they have lost are in your presence eternally.

[25 : 56] We pray again that you would give wisdom to our politicians, our leaders in this nation, and we pray Lord that by your Holy Spirit you would be at work in this world, and that many may be brought out of darkness, into light, out of death, and into life, out of sorrow, and into joy.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. our final hymn this morning is a hymn of faith.

By faith we see the hand of God. Do you see God's hand at work in the world, in creation, in your life, in all that goes on?

Because if you do, then you see life as it really is, and you can live with that faith and hope in him. and the Lord bless you and keep you and watch over you.

Continue to pray for one another, phone one another, call one another, fellowship with one another where you can. Continue to ask God's help in this time, that he might bring many people to know and trust his son Jesus.

[27 : 12] The Lord bless you. Amen.