

**17:11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.**

**17:12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance**

**17:13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"**

The travel note in verse 11 reminds the reader that Jesus is headed toward Jerusalem. It harkens back to Luke 9:51 that states, "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem." Since 9:51, the book has been pointing toward the cross.

In Greek, the words "leprosy" (λέπρα; *lepra*) or "leprous" (λεπρός; *lepros*) simply mean "scaly" and were used to describe a number of skin diseases. Leprosy is an ancient disease that has even been found in mummies in Egypt. Luke 4:27 says, "there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet," and there were still many in Jesus' day. Leprosy is caused by bacteria that were first seen under a microscope in 1873 by a Norwegian doctor named Armauer Hansen; thus, the disease is also known as "Hansen's disease." There are still probably a million and a half cases of leprosy in the world, mostly in third world countries that lack adequate medical care.

According to the American Leprosy Missions website, leprosy is transmitted primarily through coughing and sneezing, but in most cases, it is spread through long-term contact with a person who has the disease and has not been treated. It causes an infection that affects the skin, destroys nerves and can also cause problems in the eyes and nose. "Early signs include spots on the skin that may be slightly red, darker or lighter than normal skin. The spots may also become numb and have lost hair. Often they appear on the arms, legs or back. Sometimes the only sign may be numbness in a finger or toe. If left untreated, hands can become numb and small muscles are paralyzed, leading to curling of the fingers and thumb. When leprosy attacks nerves in the legs, the feet can be damaged by untended wounds and infection. If the facial nerve is affected, a person loses the blinking reflex of the eye, which can eventually lead to blindness. Bacteria entering the lining of the nose can cause the nose to collapse. Although toes and fingers do not "fall off" they become shortened and deformed as the cartilage is absorbed into the body. Repeated injury and infection of numb areas in the fingers or toes can cause the bones to shorten. The tissues around them shrink, making them short. Untreated, leprosy can cause deformity, crippling and blindness" (American Leprosy Missions website).

In villages of Africa and Asia, a person with Hansen's disease has been known to reach directly into a charcoal fire to retrieve a dropped potato. Nothing in his body tells him not to. Patients at a hospital in India would work all day gripping a shovel with a protruding nail or extinguish a burning wick with their bare hands or walk on splintered glass. Dr. Brand (a modern expert on leprosy) records that on one occasion he tried to open the door of a little storeroom, but a rusty padlock would not yield. A patient, an undersized, malnourished, ten-year-old approached him smiling. "Let me try, Sahib Doctor," he offered and reached for the key. With a quick jerk of his hand, he turned the key in the rusty lock. Brand was dumbfounded. How could this weak youngster show more strength than him? His eyes caught a telltale clue. There was a drop of blood on the floor. Upon examining the boy's fingers, Brand

discovered the act of turning the key had gashed the finger open to the bone. Skin, fat, and joint were all exposed, yet the boy was completely unaware of it (MacArthur).

Leprosy is such a serious disease that the Old Testament banned lepers from society. In Numbers 5:2, God said through Moses, "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper" (also see Lev. 13:45, 46; 2 Ki. 7:3). There were also times when God used leprosy as a punishment. Naaman and Uzziah were lepers due to divine punishment.

Needless to say, as horrific as the disease itself was with the infections and gross deformities, the social isolation was worse. Lepers were religiously and socially defiled. They were isolated from their families. They had no friends. They had no job. They couldn't participate in worship and were thought to be the objects of divine judgment. Lepers were to be avoided at all costs. Verse 12 and 13 emphasize this; the lepers "stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice." No wonder they begged Jesus to be healed.

In Luke 17:13 the lepers address Jesus as "master." In Greek, the word is *epistatēs* (ἐπιστάτης) - a word only found in the Book of Luke. It was a word that was used to honor someone who had notable authority or power. The lepers' choice of this title and the call for mercy (a request of someone in a superior position to show compassion – Bock, 1401) reveal that they recognized Jesus' authority and power. They knew His reputation; they had heard of the many healings that He had done.

Jesus was their only hope; He was their only chance to be cured. All depended upon His willingness to act.

The story reminds us of a similar incident in Luke 5:12-15. There the same attitude was present: "While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you are 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. Then Jesus ordered him, 'Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses."

***17:14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.***

Jesus' response demonstrates compassion, sympathy, and power. By healing the lepers He also undoes what the people would have assumed would be a divine curse.

The OT law required that anyone who professed to be healed had to see a priest for approval to reenter society. Of course, someone with Hansen's disease would not get well by natural means, but if the original diagnosis was mistaken and someone's leper-like symptoms went away, they could be declared clean. In this case, the men's healings would testify of the power of God that resided in Christ. When the lepers were examined, the priests would be forced to confirm the reality of the healing and indirectly bear witness of the supernatural power of Jesus.

But Jesus' command, "Go, show yourselves to the priests" was also a test of the lepers' faith. They had faith in the power and compassion of Jesus to ask for healing, but they weren't healed on the spot. Rather, they were cleansed as they went. The healing took place on the way to Jerusalem. Once again, Jesus healed at a distance (see Lk. 7:1-10).

The lepers were healed because Jesus chose to heal them. Sometimes Jesus healed people because they believed; at other times He healed people who had no faith whatsoever. Jesus' ability to heal was not dependent upon faith, but He sometimes refused to act when faith was not present. In this case, Jesus asked the lepers to exhibit faith. When they did, He healed them.

***17:15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.***

***17:16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him-- and he was a Samaritan.***

***17:17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?"***

***17:18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"***

***17:19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."***

As the lepers were walking toward Jerusalem they were healed. The leprosy was gone. The wounds closed. The deformities were reversed. Their skin became smooth and clean. It's hard to imagine the feeling those ten men must have had. Not only were they physically well, they were able to go back to family and friends, and enjoy life once again.

Jesus had given them social and religious acceptability and that is what fills their horizons; they all wanted to get to Jerusalem, be reunited with loved ones, and enjoy the food, drink and comforts of life that they had once known as quickly as possible. Yet one of the ten stopped, turned and headed back to the place from which he had come. As much as he longed to be with family and enjoy public life, there was something that he found even more pressing; everything else could wait. He first needed to return and thank Jesus.

Verse 15 says that he returned "glorifying God with a loud voice." With great emotion he burst forth in praise. But he directed his thanks toward Christ; he recognized that the power of God resided in Him. He knew that where the compassion of God is, God is. Where the power of God is, God is. Where the grace of God is, God is. And God is where Jesus is.

The fact that "He threw himself at Jesus' feet" shows that he was truly cleansed and the social isolation created by his leprosy was no longer an issue; he didn't have to remain at a distance as he had before.

In verse 16 Luke adds, "and he was a Samaritan." According to John 4:9, the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans; they hated each other. The implication is that the other nine were Jews. The only reason the Samaritan could associate with Jews was because their common misery obliterated the normal social separation.

There were ten cleansed but only one came back, and that one was a Samaritan, a person despised by the Jews. Jesus asked, "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"

The Greek for “foreigner” is *allogēnēs* (ἀλλογενής), which literally means “another (*allos* - ἄλλος) race (*genes* - γενής).” This word only appears once in the NT, and may have been chosen since it was the word written on the outer wall of the temple forbidding gentiles from entering the inner temple courts and drawing near to God (Marshall, 652); yet the “foreigner” was the only one who glorified God and thanked Jesus. The Samaritan exemplified the way Israel should respond to God’s mercy, while the Jews did not understand what had happened beyond the realization of their own personal dreams.

Jesus said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” Literally, “your faith has saved you.” Although the Greek word for “saved” can mean less than spiritual salvation, it is referring to spiritual salvation here. The physical healings had already taken place, so Jesus was not just declaring what had happened to all of them. All ten were made well; only one was saved. The man’s saving faith was expressed in trust, gratitude, humility, praise, and worship. This is the key to the story: “God’s gracious acts extend to all people, but some do not respond, and as a result they miss out on blessing. . . The Samaritan alone benefits fully from Jesus’ act of mercy and gained a relationship with God. . . One can experience God’s grace in terms of general mercy and still not benefit fully from it, because the response never moves beyond the reception of kindness to the exercise of faith. Faith responds to God’s goodness and publicly acknowledges God and Jesus, a response that the Samaritan illustrates (Ro. 10:9–13; Bock, 1405, 1406). It is one thing to be exposed to Jesus or hear His teaching; it’s another to respond to Him with saving faith.