

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

SM053 The Leper Who Gave Thanks

It was a beautiful spring day. Jesus and his disciples were walking along the border of Galilee and Samaria. The Samaritans and the Jews did not get along. That was putting it mildly. For hundreds of years, their animosity simmered and sometimes boiled over into hostility. One time, a Jewish army attacked and destroyed a temple in Samaria. On another occasion, Samaritan men dressed up like Jews, filled their garments with bones, walked into the temple in Jerusalem and scattered the bones throughout the courtyard. This was a sacrilege and insult.

If Jewish people walked through Samaria, their lives could be in danger. And the reverse could be true. Jews could be in danger from Samaritans. No, the Samaritans and the Jews did not get along. But calamity has a way of erasing the differences that men create among themselves. One such calamity is disease which has afflicted all people regardless of race or religion.

In the area where Jesus walked were ten men. Nine were Jews and one was a Samaritan. But their differences no longer mattered. They were united in a common affliction. The men were lepers. They were cut off from the normal community life that was so important to people of that time. They were cut off from family. They were cut off from friends. They were cut off from worshipping with God's people. They only had each other.

The men dressed in ragged clothes. Their hair hung down loose and dirty to their shoulders. Whenever anyone would approach, they would cry out, "Unclean, unclean." Their dress and strange words were not because they wanted to live this way. The law of the land required this so that at a glance, others would know to avoid them.

One day, this group of men was walking toward a village. They were not allowed to enter the village, but they could come close to the gates and beg. As they approached, they noticed another group of men approaching, a dozen or more, and one in the center seemed to be the focus of everyone's attention.

One of the lepers said, "I guess we should call out 'unclean, unclean,' to warn them to avoid us," but another leper said, "Wait ... wait. There's something unusual about this group. Do you notice the one in the middle? Do you see how he is speaking and all the others listening? And look? Do you see the Pharisees with them? They seem to be asking the man in the middle important questions. I've heard stories about a holy man, about a prophet who has been teaching throughout our lands. He teaches about the kingdom of God. He heals people, including people like us. His name is Jesus. Do you think that could be Jesus?"

"There's only one way to find out," another said, and he began to cry out, "Hey, all of you. Is Jesus with you? Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, is that you?"

The group of men stopped. The man in the middle walked to the front and called out. "Yes, I am Jesus. What is it that you want?"

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

And then one of the lepers said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us.” Then all of them began to cry out, “Jesus, Master, we are lepers. All of us. Have mercy upon us. Make us clean. Have mercy.”

Jesus looked upon the men who remained at a distance. He thought on the leprous man who had come running to him in a village many months before. The man had broken the rules of the city by entering the village, and before anyone could stop him he found Jesus, ran to him, bowed down at his feet and asked to be healed. Jesus knew that that man had broken the traditions of the city, but he was more concerned about the man’s needs, of his body and his heart. Jesus had reached out his hand, touched him, and healed him.

But here were ten lepers. They could not slip into a village inconspicuously and find Jesus. They would have to remain outside the gates. Jesus noticed that the men remained together. He noticed how they kept their safe distance, and he felt compassion as they continued to cry out with all their might for him to have mercy upon them.

And Jesus said, “Go into the village. Find a priest and show yourself to him as the Law of Moses requires.”

The lepers said to one another, “Show ourselves to the priests? That can mean only one thing. That can only mean that Jesus will heal us,” and as they turned toward the village gates, the ten men felt power surge through their bodies, power that seemed to scrub them from the inside out and make them clean and their skin new and fresh all over.

They gasped. They looked at themselves. They looked at one another and they began to cry out. “We are clean! We are clean! Look! Jesus has healed me. He has healed you. He has healed all of us.” They began jumping up and down, hugging each other, and then the ten began to run eagerly into the village to find a priest and tell them their good news.

Jesus watched as the men ran away, but he noticed that one of the ten slowed down and stopped. The man turned in the direction of Jesus, and then he walked toward Jesus, never taking his gaze off his face. When he came to Jesus, he said with a loud voice, “I thank you O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of all creation, the true God, the only God, I thank you that you have had mercy upon me.” Then, he fell at the feet of Jesus and said, “Thank you Lord. Thank you for having mercy upon me.”

Now the man who came back was the Samaritan. Jesus looked at his disciples – all Jewish men. He looked at the Pharisees, the keepers of the traditions of the Jews and he said, “Were there not ten men that I cleansed, ten that I healed? The other nine, our Jewish brothers, where are they? Did only this Samaritan return to give glory to God?”

The disciples had nothing to say. Many months before when they and Jesus had been rudely treated by Samaritans, they had wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans. Jesus had rebuked them for this spirit of judgment and anger. On another occasion, Jesus had engaged in a conversation with a Samaritan woman and then with the men of her village and had shown them the love of God. And now, Jesus had healed a Samaritan man.

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

The Pharisees had nothing to say to Jesus. Many weeks before, they had heard Jesus tell a story about a man left for dead on the dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. A priest walked by and did nothing to help the man. A Levite, a helper of a priest, walked by and he did nothing to help the man. Then, a Samaritan walked by, and rescued the man. A Samaritan was the hero of the story!

Now, here was a Samaritan man at the feet of Jesus, weeping, worshiping, and giving thanks because Jesus had healed him while the other nine who had been healed, the Jewish men, had run away. Jesus stooped down to the man. He gently placed his hand on the man's arm, and began to help him up. Jesus said, "Stand up and go your way. Your faith has made you well."

The man stood, wiped the tears from his face, looked at Jesus and walked away, cleansed in body and cleansed in heart. Ten were cleansed but only one worshipped. Ten were cleansed but only one heard about the importance of faith.

What can this possibly mean for us? When we come back we will discover the deeper and important lesson of the leper who gave thanks.

Interlude

Jesus, his disciples, and the Pharisees entered the village after he had healed the ten leprosy men. They went immediately to a home where someone prepared a meal for them all. As the meal was being prepared the Pharisees said, "That was a remarkable event today." Jesus replied, "Yes, the kingdom of God is exerting its power over all sin, over all sickness, and over all spirits who have risen against it."

One of the Pharisees said, "Jesus, you have taught in our synagogues and our homes. You have taught continually about the kingdom of God. You know that we all await its coming. When will the kingdom come? What signs shall we look for? Will it be signs in the heavens? Signs on earth?"

Jesus looked upon these men. These were the educated ones in Israel. These were the ones who knew the prophecies of the kingdom better than others. And these were the ones who had heard what Jesus had been teaching about the kingdom. The kingdom was not coming like a mighty warrior to drive out the Romans. The kingdom was coming like a farmer planting seed in the ground. The kingdom was not coming like a fire to cleanse the land of the pollution of the Gentiles. The kingdom was coming like a river to wash away the sins of his people first and then the sins of the world.

Jesus had shown this power of the kingdom of God on many occasions. He had cast out evil spirits and said, "This is the kingdom of God. If I cast out spirits by the power of God, then the reign of God is upon you." Jesus had healed the sick, given sight to the blind, and even raised the dead. Had not the prophet Isaiah said that when the kingdom would come the eyes of the blind would be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame would leap like a deer for joy, the tongue of the mute would shout for joy and that life-giving waters would flow in the land?" But the people would not and could not understand.

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

Jesus said, “You still ask when the kingdom of God is coming? You must hear me on this. The kingdom of God is not coming with great signs in the heavens and the earth that people can observe and predict. Nor should you listen to anyone in the future who says to you, ‘Here is the kingdom of God,’ or ‘there is the kingdom of God.’ Have you not been listening to what I have been saying? Have you not been watching? Behold, the kingdom of God is now, right now, in your midst.”

“You must hear and understand. In the future, not long from now, I will not be with you. I, the Son of Man, will be gone and you will long for these days and will not see them for I will no longer be among you. Then, some will say, ‘Follow me! I will show you the kingdom.’ Or, they will say, ‘Over in that place is a man who will bring us the victory of the kingdom over the Romans.’ You must not listen to them! You must not follow them in their armed revolution.”

“The kingdom has come and I, the Son of Man, will have my day and I will be vindicated. Just as the lightning flashes and lights up the whole sky, a day is soon coming when I will be glorified, but first, before that day, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”

The disciples frowned. Jesus was talking again about suffering and dying. He often did this. He often did it after healing a person. The people would be excited, but Jesus would speak quietly to his disciples and tell them not to get caught up in the excitement because the people would turn against him and reject him.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. They thought that when the kingdom came, Israel would embrace the kingdom and all Israel would follow the Messiah with joy. But that would not be the case. All Israel would not follow their Messiah and the kingdom that he brought. To help them understand, Jesus began to remind them of great events in their history. He said,

“Do you remember what happened with Noah? All the people were having a festive life eating and drinking. They were carrying on with their life, marrying, having families, and living without God as the time of judgment drew near. Then, only a few, Noah and his family, entered the ark and were saved. The flood came and destroyed the rest. The same will happen in these days of the Son of Man. Only a few will hear and follow. Only a few will understand the kingdom. A flood is coming and it will destroy the rest of the nation.”

“Do you remember what happened with Lot? He lived among the people of Sodom. They too had their festive life. They ate. They drank. They bought. They sold. They planted orchards and vineyards. They built homes and cities. But one day, the fires of judgment came. The heavens rained down fire and brimstone and destroyed them all. Only a few were saved. Lot, his wife, and two of their daughters. It will be the same on the day when I, the Son of Man, will be vindicated. Judgment is coming to this people and only a few will be saved.

“On that day of my vindication, on that day of judgment, when it comes, if you are outside your home and your belongings are in your home, don’t go back in and get them. Run for your life. If you are working in the field, and the judgment of this people comes, do not run back into the city for your belongings. Run for your life. You must not turn back. Remember what happened to Lot’s wife when she turned back.

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

“Listen, what I have been telling you on many occasions I tell you again, ‘If you try to save your life in this world, in this wicked and perverted generation, as it is, you will lose it. But if you follow me and lose your life in following me, you will save your life and you too will be vindicated, and live.’”

“I am telling you the truth, when judgment comes upon this people, two will be in bed, one will be taken away to judgment, but one will remain and live. Two women will be grinding meal. One will be taken to judgment, the other will remain and live. Two men will be in the field. One will be taken to judgment. The other will live.”

“Lord,” the disciples said, “Where will they be taken?” And Jesus said, “When you see a dead body lying in a field, the vultures gather around it.”

The lesson was over. It was time for the meal to be served, but Jesus had given everyone a lot to think about. He has given us a lot to think about. Let’s review what Jesus said and did on that day. Do we have eyes to see and ears to hear his words of warning to us?

Jesus ended with a common proverb about vultures gathering around a carcass. What did he mean? He meant that many of his race would be gathered to a place of death. Two would be plowing in a field and one would be taken to judgment and death. Two would be grinding wheat to make bread and one would be taken to judgment and death. Two would be asleep in a bed and one would be taken to judgment and death. The nation of Israel in Jesus’ time was not pure. It was full of sin. The people were rejecting the offer of Jesus for life, and they would suffer the consequences of their choice. They were full of disease and sin and were decaying like a fallen soldier in battle with vultures circling overhead.

The same is true in our day. Wherever you are in the world, among your people, there are some who are following the way of Jesus, the way of his kingdom. They have embraced him as Lord and are seeking to give his life-giving waters to others. But some among your people are not following Jesus, and they will one day be taken away and their carcasses thrown to the vultures.

The stories of Lot and Noah, stories from the heritage of his people reinforced this sober reality. Not all will be saved. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were lost to the judgment and only four escaped. The world in Noah’s time were lost to judgment and only eight escaped. Why so few in salvation? Why so many in judgment?

This is a serious question. It need not be that way. It could be many in salvation and few in judgment. But it depends if people will heed the word of the Lord. In Jesus’ time, the multitude of his people thought they would receive the blessing of God and the Romans would receive the judgment of God. Were they not the people of God? Had they not followed the Laws of Moses? But when the Savior of the world came, not with a sword, but with the servant’s garment to love and to serve mankind, they refused him. They wanted revenge. They wanted glory. They wanted to be supreme over all others. Jesus came with mercy. Jesus came with humility. Jesus came with truth. Jesus came to heal, to forgive, to restore, to make all things new for all nations.

It all depends on how people respond to Jesus. If few respond to Jesus and confess him as Lord, only a few will be saved. If many respond to Jesus and confess him as Lord, many will be saved. In our

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

world, in some lands, it is many and in some lands, it is only a few, and the vultures are circling as some nations of the world decay, decompose, and are close to dying.

The kingdom of God – the religious leaders and many others missed the point. They thought the kingdom was coming with power and glory to overwhelm the enemies of Israel. But Jesus said the kingdom was already in their midst. God was already reigning in the world according to promise, and he was reigning over those in need who responded to the Savior's love – the weak, the blind, the lame, the sorrowing, and the sinful who turned from their sin with a humble heart.

All of us, all of us . . . are like the ten lepers. All of us are diseased with sin. All of us are unclean before a holy God. In the story of the ten lepers we discovered that Jesus has power over all kinds of sickness and he has power over all kinds of sin. But in that story, we learned that only one gave thanks to God while nine went on their way, happy that their regular life of eating and drinking, building and planting, marrying and raising families. The one who turned back, a despised Samaritan, gave thanks to God and worshipped at the feet of Jesus. He heard Jesus' life-saving words, "Stand up and go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Friends, do you have faith like that leper? All of us are moral lepers and all of us receive the blessings of God every day, but not all of us turn to Jesus, give thanks, and worship him. Not all of us place our faith in him and follow his way.

What about you? Will you give thanks for God's mercy? Will you embrace Jesus as Lord, and worship him, or will you turn away and walk the path that ends in death where vultures circle in the sky, waiting for their prey?