

## CONTRASTING CHARACTERS

### THE THANKFUL LEPER VS. THE NINE UNTHANKFUL LEPEES

Luke 17:12-19, "Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' So when He saw them, He said to them, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.'"

Imagine the plight of the leper in first-century Palestine. Leprosy was a slow-moving disease that drastically distorted and disfigured the skin and body of its victims. The effects of an incurable physical appearance were humiliating. The skin became scaly and, eventually, parts of the body would begin to deteriorate and fall off. In its most advanced stages, fingers and toes might be missing and cartilage in the ears and nose would break away.

Yet, adding insult to injury, lepers were not allowed to stay inside walled cities. They were cast out of highly populated areas into remote villages often in leper colonies. To make matters worse, they had to constantly warn others of their disease and were not permitted to engage in the embrace commonly found in the salutations of their culture. Thus, physical compassion was an impossibility and lepers were viewed as first-century freaks.

Understanding the sad state of affairs for the leper can help increase understanding of this passage in Luke 17. Jesus heals the lepers of their leprosy (notice Jesus could heal an exterior disease, not just interior problems). So, what would we expect their reaction to be? Happiness, relief and, you would think, thankfulness! Yet, only one leper returns to thank Jesus and the other nine continue heading back to the priest. The return of only one leper prompts this question from Jesus, "Where are the nine?"

Indeed, there are some key differences between the one thankful leper and the nine unthankful lepers in this passage.

**First, there is a difference in their treatment of Jesus.** They all came to Him for help, but only one came back to Him to praise! Some only want Jesus as Savior (as He does something for them) but few want Him as Lord (where they must do something for Jesus). Do you pray to God during your problems and ignore Him in your prosperity?

**Second, there is a difference in their humility.** It takes a humble person to "fall down on his face" and give "thanks." Some give themselves too much credit for their accomplishments are too busy to thank others for helping them succeed or too proud to admit they needed help. This leper is humble enough to take the time to thank the one who made it all possible to renew his life.

**Finally, there is a difference in their assurance.** As only one out of the ten lepers returns to thank Jesus, His response is revealing. Jesus is disappointed in the lack of thankfulness of some and impressed with the "faith" of this Samaritan leper. Though all are "cleansed" only one has the pleasure of knowing the Cleanser is pleased with his faith. If we do not continue to serve the Savior how can we be sure He will not also be disappointed in us, as He was with the nine?

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