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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a totally lousy day? I read about a man who was sitting in a bar, looking at his drink. He stayed like that for half-an-hour. Then, a big trouble-making truck driver stepped up next to him, grabbed the drink from him, and gulped it down in one swallow. At that, the man burst into tears. The truck driver said, "Come on man, I was just joking. Here, I'll buy you another drink. I just can't stand to see a grown man crying." "No, it's not that." The guy said, "Today day is the worst of my life. First, I overslept and was late to an important meeting. My boss was outrageous and he fired me. When I left the office, I discovered my car had been stolen, and the police said there was nothing they could do. I took a cab home, and as he drove off I realized I left my wallet in the back seat of the taxi. I thought it couldn't get any worse, but when I walked into my house I found my wife in the arms of another man—and she told me to leave. So I stopped by a chemical store, and then came here. I've been sitting here thinking about taking my life...when you come in and drink all my poison!"

That's a bad day—for both of them! The Bible never promises our lives will be free from pain and difficulties, instead the Bible promises we will have many trials and tribulations in this life. The secret to a successful life is knowing where to turn for help when you have a problem. That's the lesson we are going to learn today from a man who had leprosy. Let's read about it beginning in Luke 17:11:

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled 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? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go, your faith has made you well."

As you study the New Testament you find Jesus performed many miracles and He shared many parables. Always take time to pause and look below the surface of the scripture because there is a miracle hidden in every parable, and there is a parable to be found in every miracle. On the surface, Jesus heals ten men of leprosy and only one returned to thank Him. In addition to this miraculous healing, there are some valuable spiritual principles to be found. I want us to look below the surface because I think there are at least seven important lessons we can learn about ourselves.

1. YOU HAVE A DEADLY PROBLEM THAT ONLY JESUS CAN FIX

As a boy in church, I can remember hearing about lepers in the Bible. For a long time I thought the preacher was saying "leopards." So I pictured Jesus working with big jungle cats. I recall hearing one old country preacher pronounce it "leapers." So I pictured men who went around jumping all the time. It's funny the way a child's mind works! But there is nothing funny about leprosy.

In biblical times, leprosy was a terrible problem. The word was often used to describe a variety of skin diseases, but doctors believe most of the people suffered with what we now call Hansen's Disease. It starts with a white patch of skin that becomes numb, so much so that the victims cannot even feel a needle piercing the spot. The patch begins to spread all over the body and often manifests itself on the face, so the disease is impossible to hide. It then begins to form spongy tumors on the face and, at the same time, attacks the internal organs as well. The nerve endings become numb so the victim cannot tell when something is hurting him, like fire burning his hand. The leprosy itself was not fatal, but more lepers died from other diseases they contracted because of their weakened condition.

Lepers were called "the walking dead," and were kicked out of their homes and villages and forced to live in colonies with other lepers. They couldn't work or worship at the temple.

Even though none of us have leprosy, that's a good description of us. We are all born with a deadly disease the Bible calls terminal sin; it causes us to be spiritual outcasts. It's part of our genetic code. I got it from my parents who got it from their parents, and it goes all the way back to a couple named Adam and Eve. The Bible says, "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. From the soul of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil." (Isaiah 1:4, 6)

Those words were written 2,700 years ago, but God could say exactly the same thing about our rotten culture today. The Old Testament prophets teach us God holds both individuals and nations accountable for sin and immorality. Studying prophecy is not so much about figuring out obscure symbols and signs as it is hearing God calling us to repent of our sin. Some prophecy buffs are holed up in their rooms trying to figure out the meaning of 666 while God is saying, "You live in a world that is sick, sick, sick!" because of the deadly disease of sin.

You may feel healthy today, but if you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, there is a terrible, invisible, insidious cancer growing inside your soul. No MRI, CAT scan or other diagnostic tool can find it, but God's Word says it's there. What are you going to do about it? You should do the same thing these ten men did.

2. YOU MUST ADMIT YOUR NEED AND CRY OUT TO JESUS

These ten men banded together and decided they wouldn't just give up and die, so they got up and headed toward Jesus. When they found Jesus they didn't talk about the weather, Jewish politics or chariot races; they cried out as one voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

It would have been easy for these ten lepers to look at each other and think, "We're not so bad, we're all in the same condition." One of them could have said, "My leprosy is not as bad as his, so I'm doing okay." Instead, they said, "We've got a big problem! We're going to die! We need to get some help!"

Too many people today are living in denial. They don't want to admit their need because they look around and they can usually find someone worse than themselves. Because we live in a spiritual leper colony called America, there are plenty of chances to think, "I'm not so bad. I've never robbed a bank, I've never murdered anyone. I'm not a drug pusher or a child molester. In fact, I'm better than many of those hypocrites who go to Green Acres Baptist Church!"

Before Jesus can help you, friend, you must quit fooling yourself and admit you have a problem, but that's not enough, you must cry out to Jesus. All the twelve-step programs agree the first step for recovery is to *admit* "I am an alcoholic. I am addicted to pornography. I am addicted to cocaine." But that's not enough, you must seek help. Before you can have a relationship with Jesus you must say, "I am a rotten sinner! Jesus, have mercy on me! Help me Jesus!"

I read about a woman who was in the hospital when she got a bad report. She was so mad at God she went into the hospital chapel to tell God off. She was angry because she thought God had been fooling people by telling them He was a God of love. As she approached the front of the chapel she tripped and fell on her face. When she looked up she read what was engraved on the bottom step of the altar. It said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." At that moment, God broke her heart and she realized she had no business blaming God, instead she should be asking for His mercy, so she did. And God healed her.

Have you done that? Have you been making demands of God? Or have you come to a place of total surrender where you've said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner?"

3. GOD'S POWER IS NOT RELEASED UNTIL YOU STEP OUT IN FAITH

Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem to die on the cross to redeem mankind, yet He still had time to stop and help these ten men. God is busy holding the universe together, but He still has time to hear your cry for help. Instead of laying hands on them, He simply said, "go show yourself to the priest." Leviticus 13 has some very detailed regulations about how a Jewish priest could declare a person to be clean or unclean. These ten men knew they were unclean, they had already been declared to be lepers. Jesus brought them to a crisis of faith. They could have said, "No, Jesus, can't you touch us or something, or say some words?" Or they could have looked at their infected limbs and said, "What? We aren't healed yet! Just look! Besides, I got checked last month, and I'm no better off now than I was then!"

Instead all ten of them headed off to see the priest. And *as they were going*, they were healed. There is a powerful lesson about faith here. It wasn't until they stepped out in faith and obeyed Jesus, that they experienced His healing power. Jesus gave them the Word—they stepped out in faith and—BOOM! That's when it happened. They didn't stand there and say, "Well, *after* you heal me Jesus, *then* I'll go show myself to the priest."

That's the way faith works. Faith is trusting and obeying God even if you don't have any visible, physical evidence supporting your decision. I love the story in Matthew 14 about the disciples of Jesus out in the boat in the middle of a stormy night, and Jesus came walking on the water to them. They were terrified and thought He was some kind of a ghost. But Jesus told them, "Don't be afraid." Simon Peter who was always shooting off his mouth blurted out, "Lord, IF it's really

you, tell me to walk on the water with you." Jesus said, "Come on!" Now here is a picture of faith: Peter threw his leg over the side of the boat and he started walking toward Jesus. Now you may think Peter was walking on water, but really he was walking on the Word of God. Jesus told him to step out and walk, and He did. If Jesus hadn't told him to step out on the water, Peter would have sunk like a rock. And when Peter took his eyes off Jesus and started looking at the wind and the waves, he probably began to think, "This is impossible! There no way I can be walking on this water." When he took his eyes off Jesus and began to doubt, then he began to sink. Jesus grabbed him and said, "Oh you of little faith, why did you begin to doubt me?"

Faith is walking on the Word of God. Faith doesn't need any evidence, it simply obeys. This book is full of God's directions on how we are to live, but with every single directive, He also provides the *power* to accomplish it. Our job is to step out in faith and simply obey Him. Years ago, heard a quote about faith I've never been able to forget: "Faith is coming to the edge of all you can see and feel and taking one more step into the darkness—trusting that God will either catch you or teach you how to fly!"

What is it today God is telling you to do in His Word? What are you waiting for? Step out in faith and obey Him, and only then will you experience His mighty power.

4. IT IS GOOD TO SPEND TIME AT THE FEET OF JESUS

On the way to the priest, one of the guys looked at the other and said, "Hey Reuben, your skin is clean!" Then he looked at his own hand, and the color and life returned. They began to look at each other and suddenly they realized they were healed. Can't you see them jumping up and down hugging one another? These lepers became "leapers" indeed!

At this point, we don't know what happened to 90% of the group. Perhaps they journeyed on to show themselves to the priest, or maybe they ran back to their families—we don't know. One of them could have said, "I want to see if this really lasts." Or, "I was getting better anyway, I knew it was just a matter of good exercise and diet." But we know from Jesus' response only one of them did the right thing. He wasn't content just to go to church and see the priest, he turned and ran back to Jesus and fell at His feet to give Him thanks. He wanted a relationship, not a religion!

Falling at someone's feet is a picture of submission and worship. Mary spent time at the feet of Jesus when He came to have supper at her house. The woman at Simon's house spent time at the feet of Jesus washing His feet with her tears. In the book of Revelation, the 24 elders, who represent all the redeemed of all the ages will bow before the Lamb who is on the throne. It is good to spend time at Jesus' feet.

Here's the key lesson:

Ten men were exposed to God's power, but only one sought a personal relationship with Him.

Nine of the men were content to receive the blessing of God, but only one of them cared enough to return to the source of the blessing to worship God. That's so true today as well. God's blessings are poured out on all people, not just His children. Jesus said God makes it rain on the

just and unjust alike. But only a relatively few people are interested in having a personal relationship with God.

Have you found you only come to God when you have a shopping list? Or maybe you use God like a heavenly 911 call? "Help, God I have an emergency, bail me out!" God loves you and wants you to spend time with Him. He desires for you to worship and fellowship with Him.

5. FEELING THANKFUL IS DIFFERENT THAN GIVING THANKS

The man threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him. The most amazing thing about this miracle is that out ten people who were healed, only one came back to say, "Thank you." Jesus even took note of this in verse 17. He asked, "Were there not ten who were cleansed? Where are the other nine?" Note his next words carefully because He is identifying Himself as God. He asked, "Was no found to give praise to God except this foreigner?" When the man came and fell at the feet of Jesus to say, "thank you" Jesus said it was giving praise to *God*.

I believe God is still saddened by how few people actually express thanksgiving to Him. Many Americans are too busy to stop and acknowledge God and simply say, "Thank you, God." Or they have convinced themselves they deserve everything they have, so why thank God?

I've never seen an episode of the television show "The Simpsons" but I read in one episode the family was sitting down for a meal and the dad asked Bart to give thanks before the meal and Bart said, "Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing." Some people may laugh at that line, but I think it reveals a real problem many people have. They live their lives enjoying the blessings of God but never once stopping to say "Thanks." They are just like the old pig that roots around among the acorns on the ground and never once looked up to acknowledge the tree that produced the acorns.

The Bible says, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:18) People ask me all the time, "How can I find God's Will for my life?" You can start by reading His Word, and this verse says clearly and plainly God's Will for your life is that you give thanks in all circumstances. If you aren't obeying that portion of His Will for your life, what makes you think He's going to reveal any more than that?

They key is to *give* thanks, not merely to *feel* thankful. Now, I'm certain the other nine lepers were thankful about being cleansed. How could anyone not feel thankful after being healed of a deadly disease? But only one of the ten did the right thing by coming to Jesus and expressing thanksgiving. There is a tremendous difference between simply feeling gratitude and expressing gratitude.

Let's say someone does something nice for me, and I look at that person and think, "My, I'm so thankful for what (name) has done for me." But if that's all I do, I miss a chance to be a blessing to that person. But if I write them a thank you note, or speak to them and say, "(Name), I really appreciate what you did for me" then they are blessed, too.

With God, don't just feel thankful: Give thanks! The Bible says in Hebrews 13:15, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of LIPS that confess his name." It says "the fruit of lips" not "a warm, fuzzy feeling in your heart." Don't just feel it, tell God how thankful you are.

But you aren't just to thank God for the good things in life. I Thessalonians 5:18 says we are to give thanks in all circumstances. Whatever happens, you can always find something for which you can give God thanksgiving.

Matthew Henry was an early American preacher and most pastors have a copy of his commentary on the Bible. Once, while traveling to preach, Matthew Henry was robbed. Now most people wouldn't think that would be a circumstance in which you could give thanks, but he did. He wrote: "I am thankful that during these years I have never been robbed before. Also, even though they took my money, they did not take my life. Although they took all I had, it was not much. Finally, I am grateful that it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

You ought to try that. If you are going through a time of pain and difficulty, why don't you try to find at least five things about your situation for which you can thank God? I've often wondered as I read about this healing of the ten lepers if Jesus was trying to tell us about 90% of us don't thank God enough. Don't be like the unthankful crowd. Determine that you are going to be like the one man who returned and gave thanks to Jesus.

6. A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS MAKES YOU A FOREIGNER IN THIS WORLD

Jesus pointed out that the one man who returned was a Samaritan—a foreigner. He acted differently than 90% of the other lepers. I believe there is a powerful lesson there for us as well. Those of us who have entered into a relationship with Jesus don't act or think like other people. We are always in the minority about the way we act and think. We never quite feel at home in this world, and we shouldn't. The Bible says, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20) It doesn't matter where you came from; it's your destination that is most important. Although we are citizens of Tyler, Texas, and America, our main citizenship is in heaven. That's why we often feel like foreigners in this place. Whenever I'm away from my wife and family on a mission trip, I always feel the "tug" of my home. I realize I'm only in the foreign land for a short time, but soon I'll be returning home. I feel the same way about heaven. This world is NOT my permanent home, and I often get homesick for heaven. Peter writes: "I urge you as strangers and aliens in this world to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." (1 Peter 2:11)

Just as this one man, a foreigner, acted differently from the crowd, so should we. A marching band was performing in a parade. All the band members were walking in perfect rhythm except one guy who was totally out of step. Upon closer examination, you could see wires running to his ears. He was plugged into his walkman and it was playing a different tune than everyone else was hearing. That's a picture of us: we are marching to a different beat than this world because we are listening to different music.

7. LET JESUS FINISH WHAT HE STARTED IN YOU

Look again at Jesus' final words to this man in verse 19. He said, "Rise and go, your faith has made you WELL." Concentrate on that last word; it's the word *sozo* which means "saved." It's the same word the Philippian jailer used in Acts 16 when he said, "What must I do to be saved?" The word means to "be made complete or whole." Jesus didn't come to earth to heal people of diseases; otherwise He would have established a hospital. He came to this world to seek and to save the lost. He came to make people whole.

Here's the result of this miracle: Ten men were cleansed, but only one man became "whole." Ninety percent of them only received a small portion of what could have been theirs, and only one received full salvation.

My friend, Jesus wants to do more than just clean you up; He wants to make you whole and complete. One of my favorite promises is found in Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6) It's a process. Have you simply approached Jesus because you want eternal life insurance, or are you continuing at His feet daily so He can make you whole? I don't know why you came to church today, but I know why Jesus showed up here today, He wants to make you whole!

CONCLUSION

Cindy and I don't get to watch a lot of television, but sometimes we enjoy watching an old movie. A few weeks ago, we watched "Ben Hur." It was the 1926 black and white version, not the 1959 version starring Kirk Douglas. It wasn't even a "talkie" it was a silent movie with music in the background and words that came up on the screen to read. Ben Hur's mother and sister had been isolated to some dark caves outside the city because they had leprosy; they pictured them as having bleached white skin and dark, sunken eyes. Ben Hur rescues them and takes them to Jesus who is carrying His Cross. This was before special effects were perfected, so they had to convey the message with the expressions on their faces. You can see the hopelessness and despair in the eyes of these two women. They look almost dead. Then you see a hand reach out toward them. It is blood spattered and bruised. You never see the face of Jesus, but you see the faces of these women as wonder and hope flood their expressions. Then as the hand touches them, they are totally transformed—their lives change instantly—with no special effects. I sat on the couch and cried like a baby. But I wasn't crying for Ben Hur or his mother or sister. I was moved to tears as I thought again how that's exactly what has happened to me. I was as good as dead, and Jesus touched me and He gave me hope. He not only cleansed me of my sin, but He is making me whole. And I don't know about you, but I don't want to be like those nine men, I want to be the one who says, "Thank you, thank, thank you, Jesus, for what you have done for me!"

"Thank you Lord, for saving my soul. Thank you, Lord, for making me whole. Thank you, Lord, for giving to me, thy great salvation so rich and free!"

OUTLINE

1. YOU HAVE A DEADLY PROBLEM THAT ONLY JESUS CAN FIX

"Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. From the soul of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil." *Isaiah 1:4, 6*

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