

Text: Luke 17:11-19

Title: "Where are the nine?"

Time: 12/1/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: My family lived in Texas a few years, and one of the experiences my wife and I will never forget is the day we spent at the Texas state fair as a young family. The day is unforgettable, not because of the enjoyable experiences of recreation offered by the fair, but because of a horrifying question we had to ask at one point during the day.

Our oldest son, Brandon, was only 4 or 5 years old then, and after enjoying a dog show together we filed out of the arena crowded by hundreds of people. When we came out under the hot Texas sun again, I saw that Maureen did not have Brandon, and she saw that I did not, and then came the question that horrified us: "Where is Brandon?"

Thankfully, the Lord quickly gave us an answer as a tall Texan came walking out of the arena with Brandon on his shoulders so that he could better find us.

I am reminded of the emotion and horror of that question, "Where is Brandon?", as I read how the Lord asked a similar one in our passage - "Where are the nine?" (v. 17). As horrified as Maureen and I were to have to ask our question, I believe the Lord Jesus may have been even more so as He asked this question about these men.

The title of the message this morning is "Where are the nine?", and I want us to see four answers the passage gives us to that question.

I. The nine are with the tenth in the path of Jesus (vv. 11-12a).

Illustration: Our text tells us that Jesus is going to Jerusalem. The path He takes to get there is described as passing first

through the midst of Samaria and then through the midst of Galilee, which at first glance appears to be the wrong way.

A.T. Robertson helps us in his *A Harmony of the Gospels* to understand that the time in Bethany recorded for us in John 11 likely happened prior to this trip, so Jesus was actually returning from Judea to Galilee in order to accompany others in their trip back to Judea to celebrate the Passover [p. 139; he calls “the marginal translation” *between Samaria and Galilee* “obscure and hard to account for”].

Application: This trip to Jerusalem would be Jesus’s last. He was going there for the Passover celebration, the Passover of His crucifixion, which would be the fulfillment of the prophetic types of that important Jewish holiday.

The Passover was the Jewish remembrance of the redemption of Israel from Egypt and from the death angel through the blood of the lamb posted on their doorway in the shape of a cross. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was on His way to that cross to save sinners through the shedding of His blood.

So that is the path we are talking about when we say that the nine are with the tenth in the path of Jesus. Our text says, “And it came to pass” (v. 11), but the Scriptures teach us also that nothing just comes to pass on its own. When we read that phrase in the Bible, we are reading about God’s plan, and often God’s plan to save all sinners, and here specifically God’s plan to save these ten men. In fact, the whole world of sinners was in Jesus’s path to the Passover. He would die for the whole world: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Just like these ten men were on the path of this Gift, so are you in His path this morning. Where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there according to His promise, and He has come here today to meet your need for Him. He has met you

and me this morning to save us from our sin, the sin for which He died as the Passover Lamb of God.

II. The nine are with the tenth at a distance (vv. 12b-13).

Illustration: In 1873 a Norwegian doctor named *Hansen* discovered the bacterium that causes leprosy, which today is called "Hansen's Disease" in his honor. There are two main forms of leprosy, one more serious and long-lasting than the other. In its severe form, leprosy creates lesions on the skin and causes deformity of the limbs, and it is highly contagious. There was no known cure for leprosy in Bible times.

Application: Leprosy is the reason these ten men call to Jesus at a distance. Their condition is a biblical picture of sin. Sin destroys us, is something we are unable to cure ourselves, and something that causes us to be at a distance from our God and His Son.

What could a leper do in a condition like that? What can a sinner do in his sinful condition? One thing only - "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." *Mercy* is God's compassionate willingness to withhold just judgment. Ultimately, the disease of these men, and every other cause of death, is God's just judgment on man's sin. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4); "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23).

Like these ten lepers, every sinner is dying and needs mercy. They are calling out for merciful salvation from the temporal consequences of leprosy. We must call out for merciful salvation from the eternal consequences of our sin. The problem is, few see that they are sinners and that it is their sin that has created the distance they know exists between them and God. These lepers could not ignore their leprosy.

III. The nine are with the tenth on their way to the priests (v. 14).

Illustration: In 2016 the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania published a study on the remarkable improvement of mortality rates in our nation during the 20th century. It said that in 1900 one in 40 Americans died every year. In 2013, that number had become only one in 140 Americans. Life expectancy in 1900 was only 47, and in 2013 it was 79 years of age.

Application: Advances in medical science and food nutrition have been a great physical blessing to our lives. We do not know anyone suffering with leprosy the way the ten in our passage had suffered. In their case, the blessing of healing came as a miracle. In your case and mine, our not having to suffer with leprosy comes from the Lord's providential care.

Illustration: But in spite of the physical and material blessings we enjoy, we live in a thankless world. The Maui Invitational basketball tournament was last week. It was advertised not as "Thanksgiving week," but as "Feast week." It seems that the world is always taking God out of everything. They even try to get Him out of thanksgiving.

And yet, thankless people still enjoy His generous gifts:

Eccl. 3:13, "And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God."

James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Our Pilgrim fathers understood from where the material and physical blessings of life come. This was the point of their first Thanksgiving celebration. The earliest account of this three-day feast comes down to us in a volume called *Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims of Plymouth* (1622). The year was probably 1621, and this pilgrim writes:

“Our corn did well, and God be praised, we had a good increase . . . . At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty” (quoted in David Beale, *The Mayflower Pilgrims*, p. 143-144).

We are recipients of the plenty these pilgrims refer to. “By the goodness of God, we are so far from want” that we cannot even remember how far from want we are. This is God’s work of providence in our lives. Why is God so good to us? Paul explains why to the pagans of Athens - that they should repent and seek the Lord (Acts 17:23-31, “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us” - v. 27). God’s gives goodness to lead men to repentance, so they can be healed from the leprosy of their sin (Rom. 2:4, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”).

IV. The nine are not with the tenth, who thanked Jesus (vv. 15-19).

Illustration: A quick search of our KJV Bible tells me that the need to give thanks to the Lord is mentioned in the Psalms about 30 times. Psalm 136 is perhaps one of the most emphatic about our need to give thanks to God: “O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever” (vv. 1-3). “O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever” (v. 26).

The mercy referred to in those verses is the expression of God's covenantal love for His covenanted people. We thank Him in response to that covenantal love especially.

I believe that this is why our Lord was so horrified when He asks the question, "Where are the nine?" We have all forgotten to say "thank you" from time to time, but the forgetfulness of these nine is rooted in a spiritual condition that knows little about a proper response to the merciful covenantal love of God. One was the exception, and I want us to notice three things about his thankfulness.

1. The eyesight of his thankfulness was exceptional (v. 15a).

Application: Our verse tells us that this one "*saw* that he was healed." That is significant because of what was said about Jesus in the previous verse, "And when he *saw* them, he said unto them." There are two people who are able to see what others cannot in this account, the Lord Jesus and the one thankful leper. It is no small thing to be able to see the way these two were able to see. So what do they see?

(1) Jesus could see the true need of others. We read elsewhere of His seeing multitudes and being moved with compassion for their spiritual need. That is how He can see. He saw the leprosy of these men, but He saw more. He saw the condition of their thankless heart, save one.

(2) The thankful leper could see that Jesus had met his need, that he had been not just cleansed (v. 14), but healed. It was not just that he knew that he got better; it was that he understood the ramifications of the fact that Jesus did it. That was the thankful leper's special ability to see.

How is our spiritual eyesight? Can we see the spiritual needs of people and the way Jesus can meet those needs? Can we see our own spiritual need and the way He must meet that need, or it will go unmet? That ability to see can only come from the

illuminating power of the Holy Ghost. We are blind by nature to our need and the suitability of Christ to meet that need, but God's Spirit can make us see these things. It is a great joy to for someone to see like this.

2. The worship of his thankfulness was exceptional (v. 15b-18).

Application: The one thankful leper worshipped publicly (with a loud voice), in a way that glorified God, and yet humbly as he fell on his face before the Savior. True worship is an expression of thankfulness. Neglect of worship is an expression of thanklessness. When Jesus asks, "Where are the nine?", He wants to know where their worship was. On how many Sundays does He ask the same of us?

The Psalmist said we are to "enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Ps. 100:4). Are we thankful enough to worship publicly with a loud voice, for God's glory, and humbly falling at our Savior's feet each day?

3. The faith of his thankfulness was exceptional (v. 19).

Application: The phrase, *hath made thee whole*, is the word for *salvation*. I think that Jesus was talking about a wholeness that went beyond the leprosy of this man. Everyone had been cleansed of their leprosy, and all would get sick again and eventually die, but this man's faith had also saved him from the spiritual disease of his sin. Only one of the ten had faith that had saved him from his sins. His thankfulness was the fruit of a changed heart saved by faith.

Conclusion: And so, Jesus asks in concern and disappointment, regarding all on whom He has had mercy, "Where are they?" "Where is their saving faith?" "Where is their thankful worship?" "Where is their spiritual understanding?" "Are there none to give glory to God, except this stranger?" Do we have an answer for Him?

Jesus notes that the thankful one is a stranger (v. 18). If we answer the Lord with our thankfulness, we will be strangers in this thankless world too. My brother sang a song at my ordination service, which is a prayer that the Lord would make me a stranger like the thankful stranger of this passage:

“Make me a stranger on earth, dear Savior,  
Make me a stranger more like Thee.  
Help me keep my focus on heavenly treasures,  
And not on earthly things may it be.  
Lord, lead me onward as a pilgrim bound for heaven never to roam.  
Make me a stranger on earth, dear Savior, till I see my heavenly home.

“Lord, I’ve found myself loving earthly treasures:  
Simple pleasures taking your place.  
Nothing can measure to heavenly treasures:  
Hearing ‘Well done,’ and seeing Your face.  
Lord, lead me onward as a pilgrim bound for heaven never to roam.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*