

The Cast | People Engaged in the Story of Jesus Christ

The Lepers

Luke 17.5-21

March 18, 2018

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" ⁶ And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you. ⁷ "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? ⁸ "But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? ⁹ "He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? ¹⁰ "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"

¹¹ While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; ¹³ and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine-- where are they? ¹⁸ "Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."

²⁰ Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

We've been looking at the many characters who meet Jesus Christ in the Four Gospels... each encounter REVEALS a little more about the Man at the center of the story – WHO He is and WHAT He's come to do.

Last week we saw that after Jesus raised Lazarus, the Pundits plot to kill Jesus AND Lazarus! Judas is fearfully clinging to money. And Mary of Bethany is awakened to what Jesus Christ was really doing: He was being poured out like perfume, the fragrance of Heaven poured out on Earth...Mary GOT IT!

Last week we looked at CONTRASTS... including the contrast of faith and fear...TODAY, we look at faith from another angle NOT to negate what we saw last week but to fill out our

understanding and our experience with FAITH: what does it mean to believe or to have faith in Jesus Christ?

Faith is a big deal in our “cultural moment”... type the word into your search-bar and you’ll find over 200 million websites that focus on that word... There’s apparently a vast array of beliefs ABOUT belief.

Christians make a big deal about this word and the Bible sees it as a matter of life and death. It’s not really something that can be taught or memorized (like state capitals or knitting) – it’s actually a GIFT from God (Eph 2.8-9) ... and we don’t really need MORE of it... but only to direct what we have at the right Target.

So today...another look at this crucial topic – what does it mean to have faith in Jesus Christ...what does it mean to BELIEVE? We’ll say three things about faith:

- 1) NEED is the OCCASION
- 2) RECEIVING is its ESSENCE
- 3) WONDER is the RESULT

The disciples ask, “Lord, increase our faith”, Jesus Christ says, “It’s not more – it’s where it’s directed?” – it’s like walking out on a frozen pond where the ice is two feet thick – you trust the ice but it’s NOT the trust that supports you – it’s the ICE.

One person may be totally trusting...another may be barely trusting but BOTH will get to the other side because the ice is THICK...a little faith (a mustard seed) if directed at the right object will be enough.

On the other hand – if the ice is a half-inch thick, it doesn’t matter how much faith you have...that ice won’t support you!

And then Jesus tells this little parable of a slave who only does what’s required...and then says, “I’m an unprofitable servant...I’ve done what I was supposed to do...” The lesson is: if you obey ALL God’s commands (and NONE of you do!) – big deal! Don’t act as if God should be impressed/owe you something.

Then come these ten lepers (our cast members). Jesus and the disciples are in the borderlands between Galilee and Samaria... It’s a place where lines are drawn and where lines are blurred...it’s an ethnically, religiously mixed region.

Jewish law required that contagious people with any form of serious, chronic rash or skin-disease be separated from others and THIS group of ten have banded together to help each other and they’re OUTSIDE a village and they are “at a distance” – a picture of being excluded and needy.

The Law required them to announce their presence wherever they went to warn people to keep their distance. And this group, had apparently heard of Jesus the Rabbi; they yell from a distance looking for mercy.

Now, the first observation we have to make here is that faith is born in the soil of NEED. Had these men never contacted a disease that kept them isolated and at a distance from society...they may never have come into contact with Jesus Christ...may never have cried out for mercy...UNLESS, of course, they had some OTHER FORM OF NEED.

Basically, ALL the cast members we've met (over these past four years!) all the people who had contact with Jesus Christ and BELIEVED...all of them had a NEED... need is the soil where faith germinates!

Those who were at the recent Ligonier Conference in Orlando heard Joni Eareckson Tada. She's a Christian who became a quadriplegic after a diving accident as a 17 year old...and she said, "Spiritually speaking, suffering is your friend." Why? Because need is the occasion for faith. Suffering, shame, a realization of one's guilt before the God who will hold all people accountable, weakness, helplessness... no one comes to faith WITHOUT NEED. You must be overwhelmed by something beyond your control. You need NEED... to shatter the illusion that YOU are can handle it. The Recovery Movement has it right: (Step ONE) "We admitted we were powerless over _____ - that our lives had become unmanageable. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

That's why its just NOT true when people say, "God will never give you more than you can handle." If we can always handle it – we will NEVER come to depend on God... faith is always occasioned by need.

That's NOT to say that everyone in NEED comes to believe...but no one comes to faith without an overwhelming sense of need and weakness.

So to echo my paralyzed sister, "Spiritually speaking, suffering is your friend."

What does it mean to believe?: 1) NEED is the OCCASION 2) RECEIVING is its ESSENCE.

They refer to Him as "Master"...probably looking for a miracle (not just money – mercy!). And Jesus sends them to see the priests because the Jewish priests had the authority to verify when a skin-disease was cured and ONLY the priests could return a person to society and declare a person no longer unclean. (Lev 13-14)

And as they go...maybe making a long journey to Jerusalem...to the Temple...to where the priests could be found... as they obey the Torah...and as they obey "the Master"...as they go,

they are “cleansed”... They will be certified by the priests and their “distance” from society will END!

And THAT could’ve been the end of the story except that ONE of these now former lepers...just could NOT follow directions... He apparently launched out with the others to make the long trip to the Temple in Jerusalem to see the priests and get cleared... and as they journeyed they were cleansed...

And about HIM it says, “Now one of them when he SAW that he had been healed turned back...”

“When he SAW that he had been healed...” Didn’t they ALL see they were healed? I think so...but ...he alone really SAW...They may have been so intent on obeying the order, obeying the Law (the Torah) that they didn’t really take the time to stop and ...SEE.

But this ONE former leper... apparently started to do the right thing...set out to obey... but then something else claimed his attention...distracted him...and kept him from DOING WHAT HE WAS TOLD TO DO!

And Luke...saves it to this point in the story...a twist ... a shocker... (QUOTE) “And HE was a Samaritan!”

A WHAT? Ugh! Those terrible Samaritans just can’t follow directions! What IS wrong with those people?!

And Jesus Christ... applauds the disobedient man and apparently criticizes the ones who obeyed?

“Only one came back?” asks Jesus...“this foreigner?!”

“Well, of course only ONE came back...The others were busy DOING what YOU told them to DO...like good servants... THEY should be rewarded! But HE, this ignorant Samaritan... he just wouldn’t do what he was told...and YOU, Jesus ... commend HIM?”

Are you saying, T.J., that some things are MORE important than obeying God’s Law?

I’m saying that THIS MAN received ...that’s the essence of faith, TO RECEIVE. He was given a gift that he KNEW he didn't deserve... and he saw it.

The other guys were busy DOING for God (or for themselves)... maybe even telling themselves that they were earning this cleanness by keeping the Law (like good servants when really they were only unprofitable servants at best!). But he wasn’t thinking in the conventional way, wasn’t thinking, “I do for God – I obey – and then God does for ME...”

Instead he returned to Jesus because (and here's my little joke) he returned to Jesus because he was THANKING OUTSIDE THE BOX!

There was no sense of deserving in this man...in fact even if he wanted to, he COULDN'T have obeyed the command of Jesus or Torah...WHY (you ask)? BECAUSE, he was (end v. 18) he was a foreigner!

That's a Greek word used only once in the entire New Testament... But it was a very famous word and all observant Jews knew it well – it was found in big letters in the Temple: “NO foreigners beyond this point!” (same word – “allogenes” in Gk)

He couldn't have gone to the priests and couldn't have accessed the Temple... He could DO nothing to earn or deserve his healing...he could only receive it.

The essence of believing is to receive. This man could ONLY receive...he could only believe...and he did. And seeing with the eyes of faith that he had been GIVEN, been gifted this incredibly valuable undeserved favor...this grace...He returns to the True Priest and the True Temple – Jesus Christ.

So, T.J., let's just take this from the top: are you saying that to receive from God...to believe is more important than to obey?

I'm saying...NO... Jesus Christ is SHOWING: YOU CAN NOT obey without believing? And believing is to rest and receive ...it's to see that even if I obeyed all God's laws perfectly...I still would deserve NOTHING... but I haven't obeyed perfectly (that's a gross understatement! – I haven't obeyed at all! I haven't loved God with my whole heart and haven't loved people...) BUT Jesus Christ, is my Advocate and He has obeyed IN MY PLACE. I only receive it.

He has borne in His own Body on the Cross all my guilt...He took the blame FOR me...and I have only received it...it's been gifted NOT based on MY deserving but on the basis of His deserving!

And the result of this receiving is WONDER.

When this “foreigner” saw that Jesus Christ was the Source of healing ...he saw that this was the King of the Kingdom... he was filled with wonder and he made his way back to that Source... “glorifying God with a loud voice...falling on his face at Jesus Christ's feet...and giving thanks to Him. AND ‘he was a Samaritan’.”

He alone actually obeyed by faith and he alone made it to the True Temple and to the True High Priest ...and this man received MORE than a good complexion and societal acceptance: he received salvation – your faith has saved you (end of v. 19).

The Pharisees go on to ask Jesus, "What are the signs of the Kingdom...and where will it take place?" ...and Jesus says, "How will you recognize the Kingdom if you can't even recognize the King... this 'foreigner' who's not allowed in the Temple...HE SEES THE KING AND HE sees the Kingdom... he believed and it filled him with wonder, love and praise.

You guys have lost a sense of wonder...you have to regain childlike eyes... you're too mature to receive... too old and too respectable to just believe.

That's what happens to everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ: they face overwhelming need... They receive overwhelming grace (receiving is the essence of faith) and they're filled with overwhelming gratitude...they "thank outside the box."

If you are in the place of need...if you're overwhelmed by guilt and know that you're not able to atone for your wrongs... if you're overwhelmed by need...if you are ready to receive a gift (rather than earn a reward)... please come and talk to me or someone after the service...

And if you're already seeing Jesus Christ as the True Temple and True High Priest you need...then sing out, fall at His feet and glorify God with a loud voice.