

AN OUTCAST'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE MASTER

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Luke 17:11-19 (February 19, 2023)

How do you translate “buti nalang”? Buti nalang nakilala ko asawa ko... buti nalang my father asked me to go home early that saved me from a car crash... buti nalang I stumbled upon this church. “Buti nalang” – thank goodness for something fortunate, something good. In our passage, how fortunate it was for the lepers that Jesus passed by their town.

With the way they encountered Jesus, it was not something by chance. God orchestrated it to snatch one man out of darkness.

CHRIST MINISTERED UNTIL THE VERY END

Let's begin with verse 11. Luke gives a geographical reference to where Jesus is. He is between Samaria and Galilee as He is on His way to Jerusalem. This is a travel narration. From the early chapters of Luke, we see Christ's Galilean Ministry and now a thematic change to an unwavering focus on His messianic destiny in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was His final destination to fulfill prophecy, and everything Jesus did on His way to Jerusalem was to minister until the end of His earthly life. His compassion on the lost never wavered. This story allows us to see Christ's character. The following verses are full of God's goodness.

In verse 12, while Jesus is on His way to fulfill prophecy, He meets ten dirty men. Lepers were considered outcasts of society – stinky and unclean – that is why they stood “at a distance.” But take note that not all leprosy was life-threatening. Leprosy was a term used for a number of skin diseases. Nevertheless, they were not allowed to live in a walled city. Leviticus 13:45-46 states that lepers had to wear torn clothes, live outside the camp, and cry out, “unclean, unclean!” Their skin disease was treated as a direct curse from God. Everyone avoids you not only because people were afraid to get the disease, but also because they avoided the inconvenience and hassle to ritually clean one's self from contact with a leper; you were clearly unwelcomed.

CHRIST HEARS OUR DESPERATE PRAYERS

In the next verse, the ten lepers cry out something else. Instead of crying out “unclean, unclean,” they pour out their hearts screaming for attention, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Their desperation sounded like they were trapped on an island surrounded by shark infested waters, and suddenly a ship is seen from a distance that could rescue them. It is the same desperation as the Canaanite woman found in Matthew 15:22-25. This is a beautiful prayer of desperate men. Jesus loves desperate prayers, especially when it is a desperate plea for our souls. A cry from people who deserve nothing but asking for everything – asking for restoration.

CHRIST GIVES MERCY TO THE UNDESERVING

Verse 14 – Jesus tells the lepers to go to the priest. As they were going, they were cleansed. In Leviticus 14:2, their law says that when lepers are healed, they need to be first cleansed by the priest before they are allowed to rejoin society. By instructing the ten lepers to go to the priest, it signified two things: first, they were already healed, and second, it shows that Jesus is not a rebel against the law as what the Pharisees would claim.

Notice also that Jesus heals their disease without saying anything. He just tells them to go to the priest. What power! They were correct in crying out to the Lord because only He could



help them. Jesus also gave them what they wanted – He gave them mercy. Mercy to get back to their daily lives. Mercy to the underserving.

In verses 15 and 16, the lone Samaritan leper is used by Luke to show us an example of how we should react to the Master – with gratefulness and authentic faith. His reaction was prompt – This leper prioritized going to God before the priest. His reaction was with proper posture – he fell prostrate at Jesus' feet. He used to shout “unclean, unclean” but now is shouting praises to his Master. This man's thoughts, words, and actions show how truly grateful he was. Luke uses him as an example because it is easier for us to relate and to recognize Christ through the eyes of this Samaritan leper. An unclean man who was in desperate need of a Savior. This leper's healing brought about a change in priorities. What about us? This is a good gentle rebuke and reminder for us, especially now when social media for many, is primarily used to rant and show ungratefulness. Through our lives today, we should emulate the gratefulness of this leper and exemplify authentic saving faith just like him.

CHRIST EXPECTS OUR APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

The next two verses (v. 17-18), we see Jesus asking a question: Where are the other nine? Was this question cynical, rhetorical, or sarcastic? On the contrary. It actually shows compassion. The other nine lepers also called out to Jesus and called Him Master. Jesus hoped to see the manifestation of their faith. It's safe to assume that the nine were surely thankful for being healed. Who wouldn't be? But what was the difference between these 9 and the lone Samaritan leper? Weren't they being obedient in following Christ's command to go to the priest? But what distinguishes a true believer's thankfulness from a normal person's thankfulness is that they discern God at work through Jesus and worship Him at His feet.

Luke 18:37-43 and John 9:35-38 give us similar examples of the proper reactions to Jesus. For us believers, were we not also cleansed from our spiritual leprosy? No matter how dirty you think you are, no matter how filthy you may seem to be in the eyes of men and God, the Lord is never too far to save. He is mighty to save.

CHRIST AFFIRMS AUTHENTIC SAVING FAITH

In the last verse in our story (v.19), Christ affirmed authentic faith. “Your faith has made you well.” What was the leper made well of? What did Jesus mean? Jesus mentions this phrase three other times (Luke 7:50, 8:48, 18:42). Jesus is not telling the leper that he is healed (the leper already knows that he is healed). Jesus is affirming his authentic faith. He didn't just receive physical healing but spiritual healing. His faith has saved him.

Jesus wants to show that the faith of this Samaritan leper was indeed authentic faith. It's not the intensity of your faith that matters, or the gravity of your faith, but the OBJECT of your faith! This leper's faith is a great example of a faith focused on Christ. Salvation has come for this leper through his encounter with Jesus. How fortunate for this leper that Jesus (the only way for salvation) passed by on His way to Jerusalem where scriptures will be fulfilled and the atonement of our sins through the Master's sacrifice will be accomplished.

Don't forget that being ungrateful is a sin. The greatest blessing a believer must be thankful for is meeting the Master along the way. For without that encounter, we would never be made well from our poor spiritual condition.