

In my younger years (in the School-yard), there were some really distasteful jokes around. And some of the worst of them, were the “leper” jokes. You’ll be glad to know, that I’m not going to tell any of them now, because they really are gross.

But strangely enough, as a kid, it was probably those really gross Leper jokes, that taught me of just how awful the disease of leprosy was.

The minister could teach us about the miracles of Jesus, and tell us just how awful Leprosy was, but the jokes were much more illustrative.

In the Bible, there’s a whole bunch of diseases that were referred to as “Leprosy” (particularly in the Old Testament), but in the New Testament, it’s most likely, what we today call “Hanson’s Disease”. It’s a bacterial infection that attacks the nervous system, and it causes parts of the body to deform.

Symptoms are:ⁱ

- disfigurement of the skin and bones;
- twisting of the limbs;
- curling of the fingers;
- thickening of the ear;
- collapsing of the nose; and

- Tumour-like growths on the skin

- but a leper would also have badly infected wounds, because they would lose their sense of feeling/pain.

And so they would unknowingly injure themselves, and those injuries would then get infected, and it could be really gross.

Leprosy, is an **infectious** disease. That's why the Old Testament had a heap of rules on Leprose diseases, and how a Leper had to isolate, so the disease wouldn't spread.

And in the Old Testament, the Priests weren't only responsible for the worship of God – they were the ones who basically fulfilled the role of “public health officers”, and part of their responsibility of public health, was to enforce the isolation of those who were infected.

And so the priest would examine the sore and make a diagnosis (which was spelled out in the Old Testament BTW). And if it **was** a Leprose disease, then action had to be taken:

Leviticus 13:45-46 (ESV)

⁴⁵ “The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose (Sounds a bit like an EMO (with their torn jeans and their long hanging hair...))

, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' ⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

There was no fun, in being a Leper. For a Leper, normal life was gone. And for many lepers, it was a disease that they

would live with, (sometimes for years), and it was a disease that would totally end all normal human interaction.

Occasionally, a Leper would be healed. Not very often. If a Leper thought that he **was** healed, he'd have to make a couple of trips back to the priestⁱⁱ (or the priest would come to him), to have the healing confirmed before he was allowed to come back into society... And there would have to be a few sacrifices made, for his sins to be atoned for (Lev 14).

Anyway, in obedience to the Scriptures, the Lepers were not in the Village – they were on the outskirts of the village. They stood at a distance, and they called out to Jesus: **"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."**

Now, at different times, Jesus healed people in different ways. Sometimes he would:

- lay his hands on a person and heal them;
- speak to them and tell them to be healed;
- There was a time He spat in the dirt and made some mud and put it into a blind man's eyes..

Sometimes, healing would be immediate, but not this time.

When Jesus saw the Lepers, He gave them an instruction: **"Go and show yourselves to the priests."**

And they went. Now, the thing is, we don't know how far they got, before they were healed. But even while they were still riddled with leprosy, Jesus was sending them to go and do

what a healed leper is to do... Do you understand the significance of this?

The first thing of significance, is this is an act of faith. In obedience to Jesus, they are heading off, to have their healing confirmed (even before they are healed).

The second thing of significance, is that the confirmation of their healing, is not:

- some kind of placebo effect of “I feel better now”;
- Nor is it a dishonest claiming of something that is not so, where a person is getting sicker and sicker, but they claim, “But the Lord has healed me”...;

Jesus sent them to the priests/public health officers/ the experts, who were trained and skilled in diagnosing leprosy. They were the ones, who would confirm that they were indeed healed.

So, what do you think a person should do, if they believe that they have been healed today? They should go straight to the doctor and have it confirmed... If, by faith, I am genuinely healed, why would a I not want to have that confirmed by a doctor???

But the crazy thing is, we often see the exact opposite. “Jesus has healed me, and so if I go to the doctor, that’s a lack of faith”... It’s nothing of the sort. If Jesus has healed you, let’s have a genuine confirmation.

And so, for all ten of these lepers, it was a step of faith – going to present themselves to the priest, for him to confirm that they were indeed healed. And they began their journey while they were still full of leprosy.

Now, we don't know how far they had to go.

- Did they have a priest in their own village? Or
- did they have to go to a neighbouring village? Or
- because sacrifices are required, did they actually start heading off to Jerusalem????

We don't know. But what we do know, is that while they were on their way, they were cleansed/healed.

- Jesus said the word;
- They believed Him;
- They obeyed – they took that step of faith, to head off to the priest/public health officer to have their healing confirmed; and
- on their way, they were healed.

Now, at this point, I actually am a little bit torn with the next interaction. And so, I'm left a little bit unsure of some things, but I am **very** sure of one point in particular, and of course, that one thing that we are very sure of, is the main point that Jesus is making.

So, they were **all** healed. But only **one** of them turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

And the message comes out, “What about the other 9? Where are they?” “Why are they not here giving thanks?”

And I’ll tell you why I’m “torn”. The other 9 were doing exactly what Jesus commanded them to do. Jesus told them to go to the priest. That is all part of their healing, and that is all part of their path of reincorporation back into the community.

So, what’s going on?

I think we get a bit of a hint, when we realise that the only bloke who came back, was a Samaritan. A Samaritan, is not welcome at the temple. And a priest probably doesn’t want to see a Samaritan.

You see, the Samaritans were despised. When Jesus told the story of “The Good Samaritan”, That would be a bit like telling a story to a Palestinian about “The Good Israeli”, or telling a story to an Israeli, about “The Good Palestinian”...

They were at loggerheads. As far as the Jews were concerned, The Samaritans had a long history of traitorous disloyalty to the nation, and adulterous worship of other gods...

At one time, they were part of the nation of Israel, but now they were written off as godless heretics.

So, what do we learn?

1. Firstly,
Jesus takes precedence over religious heritage. Even though they were obeying Jesus by going to the priest, they could have delayed that for a little while. It was much more important to immediately give God praise.

2. Secondly,
praise of God, is rightly given to Jesus. They praised God, by thanking Jesus. God the Son, is to be worshipped, as God the Father is worshipped.

3. Thirdly,
The benefits of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, are for people of all backgrounds; who come from all nations; and are of all persuasions.

The only one who wasn't allowed to go to the Temple – the only one who a priest probably wouldn't even give the time of day to – he is the one who came to Jesus. And he is the one who is commended by Jesus, for his faith.

And this point is really important. The Gospel of Luke, was written for Gentile readers – they were not Jews. And for that first generation of Christians, there was a big question for them: “If I am to become a Christian, does that mean I have to be a Jew as well?” Do I need to:
 - get circumcised?
 - go through the initiation and training required to become a Jew?
 - go to the temple and perform sacrifices & fulfill all religious duty?

- have to observe all the religious festivals and seasons???

And the answer, is a firm, “No.”

What is important; and What takes precedence, is being in the presence of Jesus. And worshipping God, through His Son. And that, is what’s most important for us.

4. Fourthly,
Give thanks.

We have so much to be thankful for, don’t we?

The gift of Salvation, for a start – the fact that God loves us so much, He sent His only beloved Son, to die on the cross, to save us from our sins...

And when we pray, how much time do we spend asking for stuff, and how much time do we spend worshipping God?
How much time do we spend, giving Him thanks?

*The Post office lady gave a little girl a couple of lollies.
And her dad said, “What do you say?” And she looked up at
the Post Office lady, and said, “You got any more?”ⁱⁱⁱ*

Sometimes we’re so busy chasing blessings, we don’t even think to say, “Thank you Lord.”

So, there you go. Most years, I do one short sermon, and that was today. And that gives us time, to give worship and praise to God.

Jesus is greater than tradition, and He is worthy of our praise and thanks.

ⁱ <https://answersingenesis.org/biology/disease/biblical-leprosy-shedding-light-on-the-disease-that-shuns/>

ⁱⁱ Leviticus 14:1–32

ⁱⁱⁱ adapted from www.holwick.com