

The Danger of Under-Appreciation

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[0 : 00] Good morning, St Silas. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the senior pastor here. If you're in the building, it's great you could gather and join us. If you're watching at home, we're delighted that you can join us from where you are as well.

And this morning, later, as Alan's already said, we're going to try having the Lord's Supper together, which is the first time since we started meeting physically again that we've done that. If you're watching at home, we're concerned we don't want you to feel left behind by that. Obviously, the having the bread and the wine is inevitably for the people in the room.

But the words that we'll say as we have the set prayer to remember rightly what Jesus has done by having bread and wine will be on the screens. And we hope you can stay with us and still benefit and be encouraged as we share the Lord's Supper here.

But first, we're looking together at this passage in Luke 17. So it'd be a great help if you're here to keep that open on the sheets and there's an outline underneath.

Or at home, if you could grab a Bible or have a look online at BibleGateway.com for Luke 17. Then we're going to look at this together. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray.

[1 : 09] Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that at a difficult time, amidst all the restrictions, the confusion, the volatility of this situation, we can hear your unchanging word, your truth that stands forever.

So we pray that you would give us listening ears and that you will be at work in us so that we respond rightly to who you are and what that means for us today.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I don't know if any of you have been watching Strike, the BBC drama. It's based on J.K. Rowling's novels about detective stories about Cormoran Strike and his sidekick Robin.

And together, as private investigators, they solve crimes. I think it's the next Inspector Morse. Just had the fourth series of it. And the one that's just finished was called Lethal White. In the story, the plot hinged on a painting called Mayor Mourning.

And a government minister called Jasper Chisel, who didn't get on very well in the drama, he owns the painting and he has it stuck up in the loft in his family estate.

[2 : 26] And a guy comes to visit, who he knows, and is pottering around in the house and notices this painting and realises that it's a lost stub. In other words, it's worth 20 million pounds.

And he realises this family are living with this masterpiece under their noses. They've not appreciated what they've got. And he can potentially try and get his hands on it.

And then, as it turns out, it is amazing what a criminal mind is willing to do to get a painting worth 20 million pounds to make it good TV. But it just makes you imagine what that would be like, to be like that minister chisel, that you could have a priceless work of art, a treasure that you own, that's right in front of your nose, and you never appreciate its value.

We're in this series in Luke's Gospel, and Luke's plea, as we read it, is that we wouldn't make that same kind of mistake with the person Jesus Christ. In a culture where Jesus is so available to us, he's so familiar, it's not hard to find out about Jesus.

There are Bibles everywhere. We are in a culture where Jesus just seems irrelevant to life's opportunities, life's challenges.

[3 : 45] People take for granted that he is perhaps a figure that was influential in the past, but maybe not today. Could we be in danger of failing to appreciate the value of what we could have in what Jesus makes available for us?

And if you're tuning in this morning for the first time, still looking into the Christian faith, or you're here today just visiting, I guess that's an encouragement to us, an invitation to think, am I missing

out on the value of who Jesus is?

For lots of us, we've been a Christian maybe many years, and yet we'd still have a similar challenge. Is there not a danger in our lives that we just start underappreciating Jesus and how magnificent he is?

Could this morning be a time to rediscover the value of him and his kingdom? So we're going to think about the story, the event that Luke records for us here, and then about the implications for us.

So the story, the first point there is an isolating disease. Let's pick things up in verse 11, with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. In verse 12, he approaches a village.

[5 : 01] And you can imagine that there would have been a crowd following him, because people were now following Jesus wherever he went, the disciples and a crowd of others. And then he arrives at a village, and wherever Jesus goes, there would be a crowd waiting to meet him.

The news hits a village. Jesus is on his way. And perhaps people bringing out the sick in the hope that they find healing. People anxious to get a glimpse of this celebrity of celebrities, the one that everybody is speaking about and hearing about.

And yet we hear in verse 12 that there are some people there not from the village itself. 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. Leprosy was a label for various kinds of skin disease at the time, but they were all very serious and they were incurable.

It was a disease that could spread. So if you had leprosy, people were afraid to come near you, and wherever you went, you'd have to warn people that you were on your way so that they could clear out of the way.

[6 : 12] And it was a disease that deteriorated. And it made you religiously unclean in the society. And this year, we've become uncomfortably familiar with what that might have been like, haven't we?

We might picture the person with elderly relatives living with them who gets a cough and a temperature and then a positive test for coronavirus and is in fear of spreading it to others, closing themselves off.

Or the person who's been shielding and still has to stay at home and just deeply misses physical affection, physical contact, hugs from friends and family. That's what we've been enduring in the pandemic.

But with leprosy, there was no hope of ever getting beyond that. You couldn't be thinking, oh, when will this be over and we'll get back to normal? It's imagining a situation where you can't ever go into a place where there are people without warning them to back off.

And a future where life will just get more and more difficult for you, your condition getting worse and worse, living in isolation from others, and then you'll die.

[7 : 25] And it's important more generally to think about what it was like for those ten men who had leprosy because in that condition that they had, it says so much about what's wrong with our world for all of us, that disease and death wreak havoc in our world.

And they caused separation between us. And leprosy caused religious uncleanness. So that where God had provided a sacrificial system so that those people at that time could go to the temple and they could make sacrifices and they could enjoy being in the presence of God, if you had leprosy, you were cut out from that.

You couldn't take part in that system. And just as today for us, we're separated from God, not by a physical ailment, but by the impurity on the inside in our hearts that God made us to love Him with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, and He made us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

And our love is curved in on us, that we're self-centered, and we don't love God as we should, and we don't love others as we should. And so if someone maybe sees us on the outside, we don't look unclean.

But if they could see what's going on in our hearts, if they could really see that, then we would have to say, stay away from me. I'm unclean.

[8 : 55] So we pity the ten men in this story, but they are a picture for us of what's wrong in our world for all of us. Our uncleanness, our separation from God and each other, and our shame.

But from a distance, they call out to Jesus for mercy. So we come to our second point, an astounding miracle. So look at verse 14. When He saw them, He said, go, show yourselves to the priests.

Just think about the compassion of Jesus. He's on His way to Jerusalem. He knows what's going to happen to Himself there. He's surrounded by the great and the good, the powerful, the rich, the poor. So many people with needs to help.

And yet He stops and He hears them. And in the midst of all of that, He calls out to them. And He gives them a promise to go and act on. For someone with leprosy to be accepted back into the society, they had to go to a priest.

And a priest would examine them and confirm for them that they were clean, so that they could then be welcomed back into society. So Jesus is saying to them, go on your way.

[10:06] And I would imagine that on the way, they might have been saying, this could be really awkward, because they're not healed yet, as they set off. And then on the way, they get made well.

End of verse 14. And as they went, they were cleansed. Just imagine, imagine it. Imagine them looking down and noticing color being restored to their skin, and the lesions on their skin fading away.

Maybe some of them had bandages wrapped around deformed limbs, and as they took them off, they saw everything restored, and skin like a child's skin, just all better again.

Imagine the exhilaration they must have felt, moving from despair to complete healing. And folks, I think Luke puts this event here, almost as a recap for us, at this point in Luke's Gospel, to say, do you remember what I told you about Jesus, earlier in my book, in chapters 6 and 7 and 8, about how explosive it was to be around him?

How wonderful, when he was on the scene. Because the question that drives this whole section, is in verse 20. If you just have a look down at the next bit.

[11:32] The Pharisees asked Jesus, when the kingdom of God will come? And Jesus says, the coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, here it is, or there it is, because the kingdom of God is in your midst.

You see what he's saying? The kingdom of God is the saving reign of God. It's where God is saving people, and blessing them with everything that we were made for, and our hearts long for.

And ever since our world went catastrophically wrong, as sin and suffering entered our world, God has been working towards the day when his kingdom will be fully established in the world again.

He'll put the world right. So that's why Jesus calls his people to pray every day, your kingdom come to God. We're longing for that day. And the Pharisees know their Bibles, they're the religious leaders, they know that there are these promises in the scriptures, that God will come on the day of the Lord, and deliver his people, and establish his kingdom, and that there'll be no more death anymore, or mourning, or crying, or pain.

And they're hearing people claiming Jesus is the Messiah, the one who was promised, who would bring that kingdom. So they ask him, when will that kingdom come? And for us, that's a really important question, because that day of the Lord is still future for us.

[12:54] We're longing for the world to be put right. And next week, Jesus will teach us about that in the very next section, very clearly about the day of the Lord that's coming. But here in verse 21, Jesus is saying, while he is there, the kingdom of God is in their midst.

When people saw Jesus' miracles, they caught a glimpse, in human history, of the kingdom of God that's still future for us. Jesus never did a miracle to say, look, I'll show you who I am, I'll destroy that mountain with lasers coming out of my eyes, or I'll destroy this tree with a fireball from my hands.

He could have done that. He could do anything. But he never operated like that, because in his miracles, he was teaching us not just who he is, but also about the kingdom that he is promising.

And if you've not thought about it for a while, it would be good to read or listen to Luke chapter 6, 7, and 8 again this week, to remind yourself of the marks of that kingdom, where there's a centurion, a Roman soldier, who's a religious outsider, and he comes to Jesus and begs him to heal his servant who's ill.

And Jesus sends him away and tells him to have faith, and the servant is healed at his home at that very moment. And then Jesus approaches a town called Nain, and there's a funeral procession coming out of the town through the gate, and it's a widow's only son.

[14:30] And Jesus says, woman, don't cry. And he puts his hand on the bier, and he tells the dead man to get up, and he gets up.

He's alive again, having died. And the people are astonished, and they say, God has come to save his people. God has come to save his people, as they see Jesus at work.

And then John the Baptist is in prison, and he sends followers to Jesus, presumably because John is having a very hard time, and he sends followers to say to Jesus, are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?

And Jesus quotes back to them the promises of the messianic age, the age that was being foretold by the prophets that the Messiah would bring.

He says, he quotes Isaiah 35, and he says, go back and report to John what you have heard. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

[15:35] In other words, the kingdom of God is in your midst right now. So as Christians, to be a Christian is to trust these promises about who Jesus is, and that he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

That's a summary that we say in our creeds about that promise, that Jesus will come and establish the kingdom that will have no end. And it might sound very far-fetched to you, if you're looking into the Christian faith, to hear that kind of promise, that Christians believe that.

But it's not, it's the rational thing to believe. It's not far-fetched. When we can look back in history and point to a time when people caught a glimpse of the world that's being promised, and we have credible testimony that around Jesus, these things really happened.

People experienced the kingdom of God. So that Luke, who's a doctor, is saying to us, this man could do things that no physician could ever do. I heard recently on the radio a program about Professor Sarah Gilbert, who, she's the scientist who's behind the Oxford University vaccine that's now being tested to vaccinate people from COVID-19.

And there's all this interest in her, and in her career, and in her team, and how they've got this far. And there's still clinical trials. We don't even know if this vaccine will actually work.

[17:10] But we're fascinated because potentially, she's a bit of a hero, Sarah Gilbert. She could be instrumental in getting us life again, normal life.

Just think of the relief we would feel if tomorrow, news suddenly emerged that there'd been a major breakthrough in battling coronavirus, a way to just be healed so that nobody had to fear it anymore. And they could just announce, just get back to normal. It's fine. We could socialize and hug and leave our rooms and visit family. Well, as well as the huge relief, think of the sense of gratitude that we feel towards whoever it was who was behind that.

Sarah Gilbert or whomever it was. The person who's given us our lives back. It's just a glimpse, isn't it, of how these lepers must have felt. Brought from despair with no future to being healed, to normal life, to hope, restoration.

And it's good to think about that because they're a picture for us of Jesus offered to save us from the deep, incurable disease of our sin that makes us unclean, that creates distance for us between God and us and between each other.

[18:35] But to get it, we have to respond rightly to Jesus. So that's our third point, a vital reaction. Let's pick things up again in verse 15 for the reaction. 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. So the spotlight shifts to this individual and a personal response. But then Jesus asks three painful questions in verse 17.

Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner? And then for the one who has come back, Jesus, verse 19, then he said to him, rise and go, your faith has made you well.

And it's literally, your faith has saved you. It's an important word in Luke's gospel. All of the lepers were cleansed. All of the lepers were healed.

This one gets told, your faith has saved you. Because he has faith, he's been saved. It's good to see what the Samaritan leper gets right. He realizes, if this man, Jesus, can make the unclean clean, then the kingdom of God is available to people like me through him.

[20:03] There's no point staying with the priest. I go back to the king. And he throws himself at Jesus' feet. And it's a great picture, isn't it? If we saw it now, we would think, he hasn't socially distanced, this guy.

Are you finding that? I watch TV now with things that have been filmed before lockdown. And I keep thinking, stop touching each other. You know, this is, you're out of line. Because we've kind of got conditioned.

But that's exactly how people would have felt seeing a man they knew as a leper running to Jesus and getting hold of him. But he doesn't have to socially distance anymore because he's been cleansed.

It's a wonderful moment. But it's also a picture of authority because he doesn't run up to Jesus and hug him. He falls at his feet because this is the king of God's kingdom.

Sometimes we hear Christians speak about the kingdom of God coming today when good stuff happens, when there's poverty relief or people are helped out of drug addiction or refugees are given shelter.

[21 : 09] And those things are important things and they're important things for Christians to be involved with, that we have compassion for the needy but surely the kingdom of God is something God builds when people acknowledge who the king is.

That's when the kingdom is built. When like this leper, people fall at the feet of Jesus and see he's my king. He's the saving king.

That's what grows the kingdom. And wonderfully, because of the compassion and mercy of this king, the leper isn't doing that under compulsion, reluctantly. He's doing it filled with gratitude, overwhelmed at the mercy and compassion of this king.

This man takes the time to see that the new life he now has, he owes it all to Jesus. And he goes to Jesus to express that, to give thanks and to praise God.

And I don't think he's saved because he says thank you. We're in this section of Luke's gospel where we're seeing what it means to be saved.

[22 : 19] It's about repentance and faith. It's about turning back to God and trusting his promises. He says thank you because he's saved. He says thank you because he's got faith that this king can save you from your sin.

And really, the application for us today of this event is to take this man as a model for our lives. That we would cry out to Jesus, have mercy on me, save me.

That we would trust his promises and receive his mercy and then we would come to Jesus and fall at his feet as God's king and say thank you to him with our words, with our lives.

It takes practice to generate in ourselves a thankful heart. It's easier to ask God for things because we're aware of our needs and what's going wrong to pray. It's easier to pray than to give thanks.

And we take things for granted. But ultimately, we will feel deeper thankfulness the more the Holy Spirit convicts us as time goes on of how unclean we are without Jesus.

[23 : 28] The depths of the uncleanness in our heart and how Jesus' grace is abundant to cover it all up. We're going to come to the Lord's table this morning.

Let's do that thankfully. Let's reflect on what Jesus did for us at the cross at great cost with thankful hearts. And as we see that model of thankfulness of that one leper, let's remember the warning from the other nine as well.

That like Chisel, the government minister in strike, who misses the masterpiece before his nose, it's dangerously easy to be aware of Jesus and fail to respond so that we're not actually ever saved by Jesus.

It's quite possible today to be like the nine. They even met Jesus. They had an encounter with him. Were they healed by Jesus? Yes. Were they God-fearing?

Yes. They went to the priests. They were religious. But they didn't have faith in Jesus. And you can tell they didn't have faith because they didn't, they weren't thankful to him.

[24 : 42] They didn't praise God at his feet. And it's possible to be in danger of that today. To be aware of Jesus. To benefit in our lives from him. I mean, if you live in Scotland, we all benefit from Jesus because so much in our culture, in our values, is dependent on the impact that Jesus has had on our culture.

But it's possible even to know people around you who do have faith in Jesus. These nine, they knew the one who was cleansed, who went back. It's possible to have all of that and yet never personally go to Jesus and actually put our faith in him personally.

and so we miss out on being saved. And yet the message of verse 21 at the end there is the kingdom of God is available to you and me. If you've not put your faith in Jesus before, you can do

that today.

You could do it now. You just admit to God that you have an unclean heart. You ask him for mercy that Jesus would clean you up in God's sight. You trust his promise.

You acknowledge him as king and thank him for his mercy. You could do that today. Today would be a great day to do that. And for those of us who perhaps have done that a long time ago and have felt like that for many years, how do we rekindle in our hearts this sense of thankfulness that we see expressed in this man running back to Jesus?

[26 : 11] Well, we do that by looking at what an event like this teaches us about his kingdom, the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? It's brilliant.

It's nothing less than the world that our hearts most deeply long for. A place where the mercy of God and the compassion of God powerfully and miraculously break in and put an end to disease and death in our world.

Where the outcasts are brought back in. Where the unclean are made clean so that we can be close to God and he will wipe every tear from our eyes.

there will be restoration. That's what it is. Who is the kingdom for? It's for anyone. That's the shock of verse 16.

That the man who comes back to Jesus is a Samaritan. He's not one of God's people. If you think of the shock of the parable of the good Samaritan if you know it, the shock is the Samaritans were the outsiders.

[27 : 11] And look at the way Jesus draws attention to that in verse 18. Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?

This is the guy you'd least expect. And that means you can never have an excuse. Something in your life that you could ever feel marks you out as unable to come and be part of God's kingdom. The kingdom is for anyone who comes to Jesus. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter your ethnic background. It doesn't matter your religious background.

Jesus is the king. He's full of mercy. Come in. Just run to him. Have faith in him. Folks, doesn't seeing that make us want to thank him?

Nobody else can do this. What he does. Bring in a kingdom for our world where the unclean get made clean. There's no disease to be afraid of anymore.

[28 : 16] Outsiders can be welcomed without fear. And where the unworthy get saved. let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you.

We thank you that you see us in our uncleanness and your response is not disgust, but compassion, love. we fall at your feet and we thank you for your wonderful kindness that you would clean us and save us, that you would give us life and hope, that you've brought us home to God. And we thank you that you are alive again, ready to return in glory and fully and finally bring your kingdom. come soon, we pray. Amen. Amen. I'm going to hand back to Alan.

I am going to tip the room. Thank you. said ■■■■