

Sermon
9/13/2020

Sermon on Luke 17:11-19
Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity
September 14, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

God is teaching us three important lessons in our Gospel text today. Let us be alert and listen carefully that we might learn them well and practice them afterwards.

Indeed, woe to the person one who hears God's Word and does not put it into practice. Jesus taught a whole parable about this: the parable of the man who built his house on the sand, his house came crashing down!

But the one who hears God's word and puts it into practice is like the man who built his house on the rock. Such a house will survive the greatest of storms. So, be alert. And put this sermon into practice.

Our sermon text this morning is the Gospel text and the account of Jesus' cleansing the ten lepers. This text, like last week, features a Samaritan who has much to teach us. Indeed, if you can learn to imitate the Samaritans in these texts then you have a place in heaven waiting for you.

The first lesson in our text today is that God wants us to cry out to him in our need and confidently trust that He will hear us and answer us and give us what we want.

This is the great definition of faith.

All sorts of people say with confidence that they believe and trust in God, but they say it when their tummies are full and their bank accounts are brimming with money. It is another thing to be in great need, and to cry out to God with confidence: this is true faith!

At the beginning of our Gospel text we have this wonderful example of faith in Christ with the ten lepers.

Here were ten people who were truly afflicted and in need. Not only were they suffering from a dreadful and horrible disease, they were considered cast-offs, banished to life outside of all normal social interactions. They even had to stay a certain distance away from other people as our text indicates.

Nevertheless, someone had preached to them, and they learned about Christ and his mercy and kindness; and they confidently believed in Him and trusted that He could heal them.

And when he came into their town their faith led them to cry out with loud voices, *"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."* Now, we have heard enough Scripture together to know that whenever someone cried out to Jesus with such words they were always answered! Always!

Indeed, the four Gospels have several similar accounts where people pleaded with our Lord to fulfill their needs and they were answered. All such people clung confidently to the preached Word that in Jesus is all kindness and grace and mercy.

And when they persisted in such faith, they were rewarded by getting exactly what they wanted!

Consider the Canaanite woman who pleaded with Jesus to heal her daughter. Even when Jesus rebuffed her, the woman kept persisting and trusting: and eventually Jesus said, *"Woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire!"*

How about blind Bartimaeus? He heard Jesus was in town (like the lepers in our text). And he cried out loudly, *"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"* And when he was told to be quiet by the people, he refused, and cried out all the more that Jesus would hear and pay attention.

And Jesus responded by healing him and said, *"Go your way; your faith has made you well."*

Likewise in our text today, Jesus commended the Samaritan who cried out to the Christ and was healed and said, *"Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well"* [or you could translate it, your faith has "saved you"]

And so we must learn this first lesson in our text: to believe that Christ is goodness and kindness and learn to cry out to Him, trusting that He will give to us everything we ask and need.

What does Jesus say in the Gospels, *"Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened unto you"*

Christians will scoff at this, *"You really think God will give us whatever we ask!?!?"*

Jesus is willing to give us the world! He is willing to move mountains and trees into the ocean if we so desire. He is willing to give us all things, even the Holy Spirit and a place in heaven. But we must learn to ask!

The Apostle James writes, *"You have not, because ask not."*

And then when we do ask it is with wavering and doubting and unbelief. You might as well not even ask.

Friends, this is not good! Repent of such unbelief and unconfidence in what God has promised us, and learn to ask God to fulfill your needs and do so with confidence.

The fact is, God is love. His love for you and me is so great our brains cannot fathom it. And He wishes to bless us so very much: bodily and spiritually.

And it pleases Him to give everything to those who love him and believe in him and confidently ask for their needs to be met.

So learn to pray like this. "Oh heavenly Father, I know I do not deserve anything good from you; I daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. Nevertheless, I know that you love me and for Christ's sake you will give and do for me whatever I ask. For you have promised to hear me."

So what is it you need? Learn to ask God boldly for it and expect Him to hear you.

Do you need health? Then ask God boldly for it like the lepers did in our text and commit yourself to him and do your duty and wait for Him to answer.

Do you need food on the table? Do you need a godly spouse or godly friends? Do you need more money in the bank? Then ask God boldly for your daily bread. He will most certainly give it.

But should you think that God does not want to be bothered; or that Christ is not all mercy and kindness; or should you waver and think that God does not hear you; then do not expect to get anything.

Likewise, friends, don't be lazy. Don't lay on your couch all day expecting God's provisions to come floating down from the sky into your lap. He has duties and work for you to do. Lazy people who are unwilling to lift a hand to help people, cannot expect God to lift a finger to help them either.

So, our first lesson, again, is this: pray confidently, do your duties, and leave things in God's hands and expect Him to hear and answer you: He will eventually.

The second lesson in our text is that we would be grateful.

The ten lepers all started out well. They all cried out confidently to Christ for mercy. But after they were healed only one turned out to be grateful, the Samaritan. The other nine became arrogant, and failed to see that it was out of God's pure mercy and grace that they got their health back.

Oh friends, we are of the same nature! How fickle and selfish we can be!

We become needy and so cry out for wealth and health and blessings as we should, but then when God answers us and we get what we ask then we become proud and arrogant and think that we deserved such blessings.

God knows that this is our nature. So it was that when the Israelites were about to enter the promised land, God warned them to not be ungrateful and He said,

"Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"

The great tragedy is that the Israelites did forget God and failed to offer thanks and praise for all His blessings when they crossed the Jordan. They got what their hearts desired, but failed to give God praise for it.

And so God judged them, and he afflicted them with tormentors.

This helps teach us that even when we get what we ask we can become ungrateful and lose what is even more important: righteousness and salvation.

Oh friends, what good is it if we gain the whole world and yet lose our soul!

What good is it if we have great health, great food, baskets of money, lots of friends and so on, and yet spurn the Holy Spirit and fail to gain eternal life and the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ!

I believe these nine lepers were once true believers, but then became arrogant and left the faith and lost their soul after they were healed.

This was a great tragedy, and it is a great tragedy today. Oh that we would guard ourselves against blasphemous ingratitude!

Oh that we would be careful to keep the faith and be thankful when our prayers are answered!

So, let us learn this second lesson, that in addition to boldly trusting in Christ and crying out to him for help in our need, that we would be thankful when our needs are met and we have what we wanted.

Now granted, as believers we all struggle with ungratefulness. It will be a daily battle to fight. Complaining and worry and ungratefulness sticks to us like sap from a pine tree, but fight against it we must.

And this trait separates us from the unbeliever. On the outside our lives can look much the same. We struggle with the same sort of problems in life. But contrary to the non-Christian, the true Christian recognizes, bemoans, laments his sins of ungratefulness and daily battles with his flesh and seeks to be a joyful and thankful person.

The unbeliever does not do this, and is stuck in his sins.

By God's grace, the sins of ungratefulness are not counted against the one who truly believes in Christ Jesus. Hallelujah.

Let me draw your attention to Psalm 103. Here, like so many other places in the Scripture we are taught to be thankful.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases" [Repeat]

Notice that in this verse we are taught to be thankful for the things that matter most: the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Oh friends, cry out to God for physical healing, for a job, for a spouse, for obedient children, for money, whatever your needs will dictate. But realize that if you have the forgiveness of sins—which only comes through faith in Christ—then all those other things pale in comparison.

Unless you realize this, you will never be able to rejoice and praise God for anything, because you are always going to be short and in need of something.

Consider Paul and Silas, those great preachers of the Gospel. Ungodly government had put them in prison and they did not know what would happen to them. And yet there they were singing praises to God, singing hymns while they were in chains!

And they could do this, and so can you, because they knew what was most important: they had the forgiveness of sins. They believed in Christ.

And they were confident that even should God take away everything from them, even their own lives, He still had to give them a place in heaven. Hallelujah!

So, let us learn to be thankful, like the Samaritan in our text, and worship the Christ who gives us so much more than physical gifts: he gives us eternal life!

The third lesson in our Gospel text today is given by the example of Christ. Here was the Son of God who, out of love for these lepers, granted them their hearts desire only to be shown the discourtesy and dishonor of unthankfulness.

Jesus would have been justified to have blasted the nine in his wrath for their ungratefulness!

But he did not. And He did not because he is patient and so full of good deeds that when one should disrespect him He took it in stride and went on to help the next person.

This is very much unlike our nature.

We will often bend over backwards to help a neighbor or a coworker. And this is good and necessary. But then when people are ungrateful for our help, then we become impatient and huff and puff and blow our tops.

How many times have I heard of some church member who does some good and is met with ungratefulness and in their anger about being treated this way leave the church, and the faith!

But Christ was not like this.

And praise be to God. When he was met with the ungratefulness of the nine, he simply went on doing good to others that God put in his path and did not become impatient or let anger consume him.

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Now make no mistake, there is coming a reckoning when those who have been ungrateful and failed to repent will be judged. But this judgement we leave in God's hands, and content ourselves with doing good as Jesus did good.

Very good, let us learn these three lessons from our text well and practice them: (1) to cry out to Christ for all things, confidently trusting in his mercy and power to give us what we need; (2) to be grateful for our daily bread and all spiritual riches and all answers to prayer; (3) and to continue doing good to others even when we are wronged.

The peace of God that transcends all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.