

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 22: Faith, Gratitude, and the Coming Kingdom -- Luke 17:1-37

Ten men with rotting skin stand at a careful distance, where the law and their neighbors have forced them to live. They are the walking dead of their world, cut off from family, from worship, from the touch of another human being. When Jesus comes near, they do not dare approach. They simply lift their ruined voices and cry, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (v. 13). And mercy comes. On their way to show themselves to the priest, the disease loosens its grip and falls away, and ten men feel their skin become whole. But only one of them, a Samaritan of all people, stops in his tracks, turns around, and comes running back, falling on his face at the feet of Jesus to give thanks.

This chapter is a string of scenes that at first seem unrelated, and yet they belong together. Jesus warns His disciples about the terrible weight of leading a little one into sin, and then in the same breath calls them to forgive a brother who sins against them seven times in a day, as often as he repents. The disciples, sensing how impossible this sounds, blurt out the prayer that every honest heart eventually prays: "Increase our faith!" (v. 5). Jesus answers with a mustard seed and an unsettling little parable about servants who, having done everything asked of them, still say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (v. 10).

Then the leper turns the corner of the chapter, and gratitude becomes the hinge. Faith that forgives, faith the size of a seed, faith that serves without applause, and finally faith that comes running back to say thank you. "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?" Jesus asks (v. 17). It is one of the most piercing questions in the Gospel, because we already know the answer in our own hearts. We are so quick to ask, and so slow to return.

The chapter ends with the Pharisees asking a question we still ask in our own way: when is the kingdom coming, and how will we recognize it? Jesus tells them the kingdom of God does not come "in ways that can be observed," for, He says, "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (vv. 20-21). Then He turns to His disciples and speaks soberly about the days of the Son of Man, days as sudden as the flood that swept away Noah's neighbors and the fire that fell on Sodom while Lot's wife looked back. Read this chapter slowly. It moves from forgiveness to faith to gratitude to readiness, and it asks whether we are living, right now, as people who belong to a King who already reigns.

Group Discussion: When the disciples heard Jesus call them to forgive a brother who keeps sinning and keeps repenting, their immediate response was, "Increase our faith!" (v. 5). Have you ever felt that the thing God was asking of you was simply more than you had the faith to do? What does it tell us about faith that the disciples thought they needed more of it, and that Jesus pointed them not to a larger quantity but to a living, real faith the size of a mustard seed?

Personal Reflection: Nine cleansed lepers walked away healed and never came back, and one returned to fall at Jesus' feet in thanks (vv. 15–18). Be honest with yourself: are you more often one of the nine or the one? Think of a specific mercy God has shown you recently. Have you actually returned to give Him thanks, or did you simply take the gift and keep walking? What would it look like to come back this week?

Read Luke 17:1–37

Study Questions

1. Jesus tells His disciples that if a brother sins and then repents, “you must forgive him,” even “seven times in the day” (vv. 3–4), and the disciples respond by crying, “Increase our faith!” (v. 5). What do these verses teach about the kind of forgiveness Jesus requires of His people, and about the relationship between faith and obedience in the Christian life?
2. Jesus warns that temptations to sin are sure to come, but “woe to the one through whom they come,” and that it would be better to be cast into the sea than to cause “one of these little ones to sin” (vv. 1–2). Whose faith are you in a position to help or to harm, and how seriously do you take your own influence on those who are watching your life?
3. When the disciples ask for more faith, Jesus says that faith “like a grain of mustard seed” could uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea (v. 6). What is Jesus teaching here about the nature of saving faith, and why does He point them to the quality and reality of their faith rather than simply to a greater quantity of it?
4. Jesus told the parable of the servant who, after plowing and serving, is not thanked but simply expected to do his duty, so that the disciples would say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty” (vv. 7–10). When you have obeyed God or served faithfully, do you tend to feel that God now owes you something? What would change in your walk if you truly served out of love and duty rather than to earn merit?
5. All ten lepers cried out for mercy and all ten were cleansed, yet Jesus says to the one who returned, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well” (vv. 14–19). What does this account teach about the mercy of God toward those who cry out to Him, about the place of gratitude, and about a faith that does more than receive the gift and also returns to the Giver?
6. Jesus asked, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?” and noted that only the foreigner returned to give praise to God (vv. 17–18). Where in your life have you received much from God and given back little thanks? What practical habit could you build this week to become a person who returns to give glory to God rather than one who quietly walks away with the blessing?
7. When Jesus describes the days of the Son of Man, He points back to “the days of Noah” and “the days of Lot,” when people were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building, until judgment fell suddenly and “destroyed them all” (vv. 26–30). What is Jesus teaching about the suddenness and certainty of divine judgment, and about the danger of a life so absorbed in ordinary things that it is not ready?

8. Jesus warns, “Remember Lot’s wife” (v. 32), and says that “whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it” (v. 33). Is there something in your old life, some comfort, relationship, or pattern, that you keep looking back toward the way Lot’s wife looked back at Sodom? What would it mean for you to let it go and not turn back?
9. The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, and He answered that the kingdom “is not coming in ways that can be observed,” nor would people say “Look, here it is!” because “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (vv. 20–21). What does Jesus teach here about the nature and timing of the kingdom of God, and how does this guard us against the error of looking for a future, observable, earthly political kingdom that the Lord is supposedly still waiting to establish?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, from the call to forgive, to the prayer for more faith, to the unworthy servants, to the grateful leper, to the sudden coming of the Son of Man. Jesus is forming in His disciples a faith that forgives, serves, gives thanks, and stays ready. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 17:1–37 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Daniel 2:44, the God of heaven setting up an everlasting kingdom that shall never be destroyed; Mark 9:1, Jesus promising that some standing there would see the kingdom of God come with power; Acts 2:29–36, Peter declaring on Pentecost that the risen Christ is now seated on David’s throne, reigning as Lord and Christ; Colossians 1:13, God having already transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son; Matthew 18:21–35, the parable of the unforgiving servant and the limits we try to place on grace.