

2 Timothy 2:8-15

8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

11 Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;

13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

14 Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Luke 17:11-19

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.

12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'

14 When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.

16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?' 19 Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'

Giving thanks Luke 17:11-19

Mark 6:5-6 5 Jesus could not do any miracles in Nazareth, except lay his hands on a few people who were ill and heal them. 6 He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Quite often miracles do happen, and yet not everyone who's actually present will even acknowledge them. Some people just say it's an unexplained coincidence if someone is healed, because maybe it can't be measured or proved. If you want one, there's always some other explanation. Here's Jesus in the previous chapter of Luke: *"If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."*

Science says miracles don't happen, and we believe in science.

And this is the central issue which Jesus puts his finger on. He doesn't pick them up on their lack of scientific knowledge. The issue is faith. It's the same with the existence of God himself. It can't be proved either way, and so whether we believe in God or are atheists, it's a matter of faith. And faith is a gift given us by God, if we want it; it's not something we can drum up for ourselves by obeying rules, it doesn't work that way round.

I think this is why Luke puts this miracle here, in a passage where Jesus is teaching his disciples some home truths. We tend to think that surely after all we've done for him, God will be in our debt.

But nothing we do can put God in our debt – all we do for God should be from gratitude, He's given us everything we have. At Harvest of course that includes our means of survival, food, drink, clothing, life itself. His love can't be earned because He is love and has always loved us from the moment we were created. Nothing we ever do can earn us brownie points, we're infinitely loved already, we just need to be forgiven.

So look at the miracle of the 10 lepers. There's a bit more to this than you initially imagine. With Jesus there always is. He doesn't immediately heal them. They call out to him to have pity, presumably they expect *something*, but we're not told exactly what. Lepers wouldn't come near you for fear of infecting you, so they call out. And he just says *Go and show yourselves to the priests*. Personally I'm not sure what I would have made of that. Would they not be thinking 'Why did he say that? Will the priests heal me?'. Well the priest at that time was expected to declare whether someone had been healed, and would then release them from their unclean status. That was the law, but as far as they were aware when they complied with his request and set off, nothing had actually happened yet. At that point, they hadn't been healed. Also, confusingly we're told that the one leper who went back was a Samaritan, so presumably he would not have been included within the Jewish law anyway. And Luke's words are 'as they went they were healed.'

That's a very interesting statement and says a lot about faith.

Jesus gives a command, it's not an invitation, it's just 'go'.

And there's no discussion, they do just go. And as they go, as they obey the command, they're healed.

Now this fits completely with some of my experience of faith. More often than not when God calls you to do something, nothing really happens unless you take him at his word and step out and start something. When I was first asked to preach I was terrified because I had no experience of public speaking. But I also knew that if I said yes it was not going to just be a one off after which I could go back to my life. I knew that it would be a long term commitment because God had called me. And as I started doing it I not only found that I could do it, but that I actually, bizarrely, enjoyed it. This maybe seems miraculous but it illustrates that if God wants you to do something he gives you the gifts you need, as and when you need them.

This miracle has a part two to it, which takes place after the lepers have been to the priest. 9 of them disperse and just the one returns and prostrates himself at the feet of Jesus, and we're told *he was a Samaritan*. You notice it says in verse 11 that *Jesus was on the border between Samaria and Galilee* and there was a Samaritan in the group because lepers were no real respectors of religious and cultural divisions - they just stuck together. And who is it who is so grateful and returns to thank the rabbi? It's the hated foreigner.

The fact that the Messiah was sent to save all people and not just Jews was demonstrated repeatedly by Jesus. Paul and eventually Peter both realised this. But there's more to this. He is, or was, also a leper and so doubly an outcast, and yet he's given a high profile as the one who has faith. We see that in Jesus' eyes there are no outcasts. All 10 lepers have been healed. But the one who comes back is told *your faith has made you well*. So presumably the nine don't have that faith, and so there's an extra dimension to it. Craddock in his commentary neatly summarises this: *The verb translated "made well" is the same word often translated "to be saved"... what we have then is a story of ten being healed and one being saved.* What's the difference then between being healed and being saved? It's clear that the Samaritan is grateful and expresses it to the one who healed him, but that above all he recognises Jesus for who He is. Jews ironically were struggling to recognise the Messiah but the foreigner, the reject, the outcast, was the one who had his eyes opened. Craddock again: *It's often the stranger in church who sings heartily the hymns we have long left to the choir, who expresses gratitude for the blessings we had not noticed, who listens attentively to the sermon we think we have already heard, gets excited about our old bible, and who becomes actively involved in acts of service.* I think today the Holy Spirit wants to open our eyes again to the realisation of who Jesus is, so that we give thanks that he's given us the gift of faith, and that like the lepers **our faith has made us well.** Amen.