ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD

The Leper - Giving Thanks to God

* Ingratitude is always a sign of immaturity
  > Babies never give thanks
  > They have short memories
  > They live for the present
  > As they grow all of that changes
* As adults - A failure to give thanks denotes immaturity.

* One day a woman was rushing home from a doctor’s appointment. The doctor had been somewhat delayed at the hospital, and the lab work took a little longer than usual so by the time she left the clinic she was running quite a bit behind schedule. She still had to pick up her prescription, pick up the children from the baby-sitter, and get home and make supper, all in time to make it to the prayer meeting at her church that evening. As she began to circle the busy Wal-Mart parking lot, looking for a space, the windows of heaven were opened, as it says in Genesis, and a downpour began. While she wasn’t usually the type to bother God with small problems, she began to pray as she turned down the row closest to the front door. "Lord, you know what kind of a day I’ve had, and there’s still an awful lot to do. Could you please grant me a parking space right away, oh, and close to the building so I don’t get soaked." The words weren’t even completely out of her mouth when she saw the backup lights of a car come on at the end of the row. It was the best space in the whole parking lot, right next to the handicap spots and straight out from the front door. She made straight for it and as she pulled in, she said, "never mind God, something just opened up."

* "Rudyard Kipling lived from 1865 to 1936. He was English, yet born in Bombay, India. He wrote poetry and is the author of books like Captain Courageous, How the Leopard Got His Spots, and The Jungle Books.

  Kipling’s writings not only made him famous but also brought him a fortune. A newspaper reporter came up to him once and said, "Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over one hundred dollars a word."

  The reporter reached into his pocket and pulled out a one hundred-dollar bill and gave it to Kipling and said, “Here’s a one hundred dollar bill, Mr. Kipling. Now you give me one of your hundred dollar words.”

  Rudyard Kipling looked at the money, put it in his pocket and said, "Thanks!"

* In Luke 17 we have the story of one man who said “thanks”.
* Why was he so eager to offer this gratitude?
* Because of an encounter he had with God.

* Encounters with God always provide one or more of several things
  1. Information - Isaiah learned about God
  2. Instruction - Moses got guidance from the Lord
  3. Inspiration - Isaiah was motivated to serve the Lord by his encounter.

* And in every case the individuals were changed as a result.

* Notice, if you would, the details of this leper’s encounter with God.

* There were ten of these men who lived together as a group - this was their society!
* They were all lepers
* What did it mean in Bible days to be a leper?

A. Their Sickness - V. 12
* There was a physical component to their Leprous
  * In Easton’s Bible Dictionary we find the following description...
    This disease “begins with specks on the eyelids and on the palms, gradually spreading over the body, bleaching the hair white wherever they appear, rusting the affected parts with white scales, and causing terrible sores and swellings. From the skin the disease eats inward to the bones, rotting the whole body piecemeal.”
  * Consider these characteristics of this disease...
    1. It Was Terrible
      a. Appearance - gruesome
      b. Agony - excruciating pain
    2. It was Terminal

B. Their Shame - V. 12
* There was a Social component to their Leprosy
  * Again, from Easton’s Bible Dictionary...
    “In Christ’s day no leper could live in a walled town, though he might in an open village. But wherever he was he was required to have his outer garment rent as a sign of deep grief, to go bare headed, and to cover his beard with his mantle, as if in lamentation at his own virtual death. He had further to warn passersby to keep away from him, by calling out, ‘Unclean! unclean!’ nor could he speak to any one, or receive or return a salutation, since in the East this involves an embrace.”
C. Their Supplication - V. 13
   * There was a Beggary component to their Leprosy
     * There were two aspects to their prayer...
     1. A Prayer of Hope (These lepers were Helpless)  
     > There was nothing they could do to help themselves
     2. A Prayer for Healing (These lepers were Hurting)  
     > As we have already noted leprosy is a painful disease. They were looking for some relief.
   * Note: It was not a prayer of faith!  
   * They were simply hoping for some relief from their suffering.

   * Note: It is important to understand the spiritual significance of this disease. - Leprosy, in scripture, always represents the vilest form of sin. Sin works in the life of an individual spiritually like leprosy works in the body of an individual physically.
   * Easton’s...
     Leprosy was “the outward and visible sign of the innermost spiritual corruption; a meet emblem in its small beginnings, its gradual spread, its internal disfigurement, its dissolution little by little of the whole body, of that which corrupts, degrades, and defiles man’s inner nature, and renders him unmeet to enter the presence of a pure and holy God”

   * Notice The Savior’s response to their pleas for help...

A. His Compassion
   * Jesus heard their prayer, looked at them, and as in other instances, he had compassion on them.
   * Seeing the need is a necessary part of having compassion.
   * Matthew 9:36 - “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”
   * Matthew 14:14 - “And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.”

B. His Command
   * “Go shew yourselves unto the priests.”

   * This is an interesting command
   * He did not touch them
   * He did not promise that he would heal them

   * Why would he tell them to go show themselves to the priests?  
   * It was a requirement of the Old Testament law.
   * The priests had to declare them clean before they could return to society.

C. His Cure
   * Now these lepers have a choice to make
   * Will they do as he says?
   * Why show yourself to the priest if you have not been healed?
   * While their prayer was not a prayer of faith, going to the priest was an act of faith.
   * They had no promise of healing when they left

III. The Gratitude of a Cleansed Sinner - Luke 17:15-16
   * Of the ten that were healed, only one returned to thank the Lord!

   * A man named Charles Brown, gave several suggestions as to why the other nine never returned to give thanks.
     > Only suggestions, but very possible responses...
     · One waited to see if the cure was real.
     · One waited to see if it would last.
     · One said he would see Jesus later.
     · One said he would see Jesus later.
     · One decided that he had never had leprosy.
     · One said he would have gotten well anyway.
     · One gave the glory to the priests.
     · One said, "O, well, Jesus didn’t really do anything."
     · One said, "Any rabbi could have done it."
     · One said, "I was already much improved."

A. The Perception of Gratitude - V. 15
   * “...When he saw that he was healed”
   * His perception changed everything

   * Illustration: An old Jewish story...
     There is a man who goes to the rabbi and complains, "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?" The rabbi answers, "Take your goat into the room with you." The man in incredulous, but the rabbi insists. "Do as I say and come back in a week." A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before. "We cannot stand it," he tells the rabbi. "The goat is filthy." The rabbi then tells him, "Go home and
let the goat out. And come back in a week." A radiant man returns to the rabbi a week later, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there’s no goat -- only the nine of us."

B. The Priority of Gratitude- V. 15

* As soon as this leper realized he was healed, he turned around and went back to thank the Savior
* Gratitude became a priority
* Note: it does not say that he did not go and show himself to the priest. That was a requirement of the law. He could not return to society without doing it.
* It is simply that he went first to thank the Savior.

C. The Perfection of Gratitude - V. 15-19

* There are two things to note here...
  1. The Cleansed Sinner Praised (Worship) the Compassionate Savior - V. 15-16
  2. The Compassionate Savior Praised (Commended) the Cleansed Sinner - V. 19

* Note: This leper was not only cleansed of his disease, he became a disciple of the Lord.

Conclusion:

* This leper’s life was never the same after that

* He was changed
  -- Dramatically
  -- Permanently
  -- In a Wonderful way

* And he was careful to say thanks...

* I am reminded of a story about an old man suffering from Parkinson’s disease. The disease made writing difficult for him since he couldn’t keep his hands still. One day he asked a young man at the post office counter to write a postcard for him. The man said sure and wrote what the old man dictated to him, and he even signed the man’s name to the postcard. When he finished he asked the old man, “Is there anything else I can do for you?” The old man looked at the card, thought for a moment, and then answered, “Yes. At the end, could you just put ‘P.S. Please excuse the bad handwriting!’”

* What are you grateful for today?

* How will you express that gratitude?