

THE STING OF INGRATITUDE

"And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" Luke 17:17.

If one were asked what is the most common sin in the world, I suppose the correct answer would be "ingratitude." This story from the earthly ministry of our Lord reveals how ingratitude works in life.

Journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem to be present at the last passover of His earthly life, our Lord was passing through the midst of Samaria and Galilee, which is thought to mean that He was traveling along the borders of these countries, without penetrating far into the interior of either.

As Christ was about to enter an unnamed village, He was approached by ten men, all of whom were in the same sad plight and knew it. They were not permitted to enter the village, so they approached Christ at the entrance. Their common misery no doubt drew the nine Jews and one Samaritan together and banished from their minds all national prejudices.

I. Their Condition.

1. They were lepers.

Stricken with one of the worst diseases of which the human flesh is heir, these ten lepers were drawn together in a brotherhood of common misery, suffering the horrors and degradation of a malady which was but a living death.

2. They were miserable.

Each of them had to endure terrible suffering. Their disease was intensely polluting and horribly mutilating. Their only prospect was to become more loathsome and miserable until their bodies fell to pieces. Visualize these ten helpless and hopeless human wrecks who were facing an inevitable death.

3. They were ostracized.

On account of their terrible disease, they were ostracized from all human contact, even from their own families. Being forbidden by the law to approach others, as a sort of quarantine to prevent the spread of the disease or the defilement of others, they stood afar off. They dared not come nearer to clean people than one hundred and fifty feet, if the wind was blowing from their direction. Cast out from society, they sought what little comfort they could find in the fellowship of each other.

4. They were humanly incurable.

There was not any human remedy for their terrible disease. Man could only attempt to alleviate the suffering of a leper while the dreadful plague ran its death-working course.

II. Their Cry.

1. They had heard of Christ.

2. They recognized Christ when they saw Him.

3. They believed that He could heal them.

4. They appealed to Christ for help.

In sheer desperation they cried unto Him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Their prayer was marked by humility and faith. Their cry was to the right Person, at the right time, and in the right way. It was unanimous, earnest, respectful, humble, urgent and expectant. The Lord hears the sincere and earnest prayers of those who need Him.

III. Their Cure.

Christ responded to their cry in the form of a command which implied that they would be healed speedily. His command was an appeal to their faith. He said to them, "Go show yourselves unto the priests." Without so much as telling them that they were to be cleansed of their leprosy, He bade them take the cure on trust, and proceed to show themselves to the constituted authorities, as persons who had been cured of leprosy. It was a real test, but their implicit confidence and faith in Christ enabled them to do it. Instantly they set out in the firm faith that they would be healed. Their faith in Christ was soon rewarded. "As they went, they were cleansed." Two things caused them to be cured, namely, faith in the word of Christ and obedience to the will of Christ. His cleansing power worked in their bodies as they walked.

IV. Their Conduct.

Thus far, the experiences of the ten run parallel, but now there is a divergence. Each had received a healthy body, restoration to society and readmission to the sanctuary, but here their likeness ended.

Ten lepers had been cleansed, but nine of them continued their journey without expressing any appreciation whatever to the Lord. They did not have a sufficient sense of indebtedness to Christ to thank Him for healing them. He had bestowed upon them the greatest physical blessing, but they did not show Him the least symptom of appreciation. Their ingratitude stung the Lord and made Him sad. It was the subject of His sad comment: "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" All right-thinking people are always startled by a display of ingratitude. What a pity that the majority of people do not express or show any appreciation to the Lord for what He does for them! They are content to get all they can from Christ, but they do not want to give anything to Him in return.

Having discovered that he had been healed, the heart of the Samaritan overflowed with joyous gratitude, so he turned back to do something he had not been commanded to do. This grateful recipient had somehow discovered that "Love is the fulfilling of the law," so, he returned and "with a loud voice glorified God, and fell at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks." He did not go to the priests, as was required by the Mosaic Law, until he had fallen at the feet of our Lord to pour out the devotion of a grateful heart. His gratitude was prompt, humble, reverent, sincere and whole-hearted.

Christ not only made him physically whole, but He also gave him the greatest spiritual blessing, which is eternal life. He said unto him, "Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath saved thee."

One wonders whether in our day of professed enlightenment and culture if the average of those who express their gratitude to the Lord would even reach one-tenth. Are ten per cent today known for praise to Him? How rare is this virtue of praise! Have you ever said, "I thank Thee, Lord, for giving Thy life for me?" Many there are who profess to be Christians who never offer praise to God for the provision of their daily food, let alone for all other temporal and spiritual blessings. The kindness of friends is taken for granted by them. The thoughtfulness of others is accepted without comment. If our Lord was touched by the lack of gratitude on the part of the nine lepers who did not give thanks, how greatly He must be grieved over our lack of appreciation of the blessings that we take as a matter of course.

Edward W. Spencer, when a lad, rescued seventeen lives from the wreck of the Lady Elgin on Lake Michigan on September 6, 1860. When he was beyond seventy-five years old, on a public occasion in Los Angeles, Dr. R. A. Torrey asked him if there was anything remarkable about that experience that he had never told. He replied: "Nothing, except not one of the seventeen ever hunted me up to say a word of thanks." The words of Edward Young may

not be too severe: "He that is ungrateful has no guilt but one; all other crimes may pass for virtues in him."

It is no accident that the two words, "think" and "thank," are so closely related and are spelled so nearly alike. The thinking man will be thankful. This Samaritan began to think and his thoughts inclined him to thank. Ingratitude is thoughtlessness solidified.

Let us commend, in heartiest terms, the behaviour of this one who did the right thing and did it alone. Our Saviour's heart was stirred to admiration of that stranger. He thanked the Lord, while the others did not. He won the praise of Christ, while the others did not. He has, through these intervening centuries, glorified God, while the others have not.

Beside a grave in Nashville, Tennessee, a stranger came one day and tears streamed down his cheeks as he stooped and set a little slab beside the mound on which were cut the words, "He died for me." The caretaker stepped to his side and asked if it were his father or a brother buried there. "No, he was not a relative, but a young man who fought in my stead, leaving me to support, as best I could, my large family. He came and said, 'I will go in your place.' He was wounded at Chickamauga, Georgia, brought to Nashville to the hospital and here he died. I have at last saved up enough money to buy this little slab and to come here from my home in Illinois to see my dear friend's grave." If one mere man could be thought of so lovingly, who had given himself for his friend, what should not we do for Him who gave Himself for us? A favorite hymn reads:

"He saw me plunged in deep distress,
And flew to my relief;
For me He bore the shameful cross,
And carried all my grief."