
21ST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

OCTOBER 13, 2013

THE CURE FOR THE INCURABLE

Pastor Jim Dunn

Luke 17:11-19

Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers,^[a] who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; ¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

Did you know that at Burger King you can get a ham and cheese sandwich? Did you know that wherever you find a joint KFC and A&W location, you can get A&W French fries smothered in KFC gravy?

The only problem with ordering those items is they don't actually exist. Not officially anyway. They're not on the menu. They're sort of a secret. But on the Internet you can find information about secret menu items served at the nearest fast food place. Then hope that when you step up to the counter to order your secret menu item, that your server is not too busy to grant your wish.

Secret menus are huge these days. From Starbucks to Denny's, it seems like just about every restaurant has a secret menu. Five Guys' Burgers and Fries already have some of the best French fries around, especially the Cajun seasoning fries. Did you know, however, that they're also willing to cover their fries with cheese and bake for a minute before serving them to you? Did you also know that you can get a chicken quesadilla at Chick-fil-A? Did anyone even know there were tortillas back there in their kitchen? Well, a lot of people on the Internet know. These secret menu items are no secret! So, why go to the trouble of keeping these items off of their regular menus?

That makes me think of something I learned as I studied for this sermon. It was no secret that leprosy could not be cured. Not by the doctors. Not by the medicine they had in Jesus' day. There was no cure for leprosy.

It was believed to be contagious, and still is believed to be spread by way of nasal mucus. It was God's law that lepers be made to live apart from everyone else. So, lepers lived together, but isolated from their families and towns, like the ten lepers we read about in Luke 17. That way they could not spread their incurable disease.

It was no secret they could not be cured. At first their disease looked like a common skin infection. But skin sores were only part of the problem. The root problem of leprosy is a bacteria that attacks the nervous system. So the leper loses feeling in his hands and feet. Can't feel pain? So, he accidentally sticks his finger into a flame or hits it with a hammer again and again. The risk of that finger becoming infected and not healing is greater because of something else the leprosy bacteria does. It attacks the immune system of its victim. Normal "ouchies" quickly become infected, festering sores. The festering sores don't heal; becoming rotting tissue that smells, dies, and falls off. The smell is what gets you. Those who have tried to provide medical services or ministry to leper colonies will tell you that's the first obstacle that has to be overcome: the smell.

So, the leper's leprosy was no secret. The fact that there was no cure was no secret. But the Lord explained what was to be done if a leper was cured. It involved the leper going to show himself to a priest to be declared healed.

In Leviticus chapter 14, the Lord takes 32 verses to explain what was to be done if a leper was cured of his leprosy.

Why? There was no cure! That was no secret! So, why go to the trouble of explaining what was to be done if a leper was cured?

Here's why. Now, stay with me.

There is no cure for sin. That is no secret! There is no doctor at KU Medical Center that can cure sin. There is no prescription medicine that can take away your guilt or help you not wrong others. We have as much chance of recovering from sin as the leper of Jesus' day had of recovering from leprosy. The wages of sin is death. Every one of us has this same terminal illness. That is no secret! So, why go to the trouble of judging one sin as worse than another and thinking that we are different and better?

In Jesus' day, Jews and Samaritans looked down on each other. Would have nothing to do with each other. But leprosy brought Jews and Samaritans together in this group of ten in Luke 17. They lived together. There did not appear to be one group of Jewish lepers over here and a separate group of Samaritan lepers over there. No, they were together, because they realized that they shared the same sad state.

That is true of all sinners. Whether we've lied or committed a felony. Whether we have put someone down or committed adultery. Sin is sin. When we make distinctions between certain sins, when we judge a brother's sin or a sister's sin as so much worse than our own, we are like lepers counting festering sores. "She has more festering sores than I do." It's funny the things we choose to remember and the things we choose to forget.

Yet, whether you choose to remember a thousand festering sores on someone else and choose to forget only a dozen or so festering sores on yourself, your cure still cost a life.

Yes, cure. A cure for what is incurable. A cure for sin. "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, be for sin the double cure, cleanse me of its guilt and power."

The Rock of Ages gave His life. He ignored the smell of our festering sins, the stink of the messes we have made, and took our smell upon Himself. And gave His life for you and me, so that no longer are we isolated from God by our sins, neither now nor at our death. Nor need we be on uncomfortable and unresolved terms with others. The Rock of Ages gave His life as the cure for your sins, so that you are able to come clean about all the things you chose to forget. So that you are *able* to face those sins and forgive yourself. So that you are then able to confess your sins and receive the forgiveness that both God and others want to give you. The Rock of Ages gave His life as the cure for your sins, so that you are then able to confront even your own secrets, your own secret faults and let the Rock of Ages apply His healing shalom to each one. The Rock of Ages is the cure for sin. The Cure for the incurable.

That is why God went to the trouble to explain what's to be done for the leper cured of his leprosy. That's why God devoted 32 verses of Leviticus 14 to explain what's to be done when a leper is cured. Because one day there would come the Rock of Ages, who came not to abolish the Torah but to *fulfill* the Torah, to be the Cure for that incurable disease. Ten lepers would know what to do after they were cured, yet could never find a cure, until the day the Cure found them. Then, they went to show themselves to a priest.

But the most unlikely one of those ten returned and thanked the Rock of Ages as God. "Now he was a Samaritan." This is the secret cure for something else that seems incurable: judging the sins of others while we forget our own. This Samaritan is one more proof to us that the most unlikely and "worst" (in our opinion) of sinners end up believing in the Rock of Ages. No matter how severe the sin or the sinner, whether a felon or a gang member or one who judges others, unlikely people find in the Rock of Ages forgiveness, peace, repentance, and reconciliation with those who we once judged.

Amen