

“The Tenth Leper”
from Barbara Brown Taylor’s
The Preaching Life

BACKGROUND

According to the *IVP Bible Background Commentary: NT*,

Leprosy was an unattractive skin disease (not limited to what is called leprosy today) for which the Bible had prescribed quarantine from the rest of society (Lev 13:45–46), although the Bible did not go so far as many Jewish teachers in blaming the disease on the leper’s sin. Lepers were thus outcasts from the rest of society, the kind of people most healthy people preferred to ignore.



1. Read Luke 17:5-17. This passage is nestled between Jesus’ telling the disciples to forgive without limit, and precedes his teaching on the signs of the end times. Is there a common theme to the accounts within 17:5-17? (Or, for that matter, the surrounding text?)
2. Consider the story of the ten lepers as a lesson about faith and prayer.
 - a. According to the *New Bible Commentary*, “The implication [of Jesus’ order to visit the priests] is that their faith would be demonstrated by their obedience and would lead to their cure.” Do you agree? Can you think of another situation where one might apply this as sort of a principle of prayer or faith?
 - b. What might this passage say when put in the company of the two anecdotes prior, about the power of faith and having a dutiful attitude?
3. According to *The Bible Background Commentary*, “This tension [between the law-abiding Jews and the Samaritan outsider] supplies most of the punch of the story.” How would Luke’s original readers have taken this? Or the lurking Pharisees? How is it significant to this account that he is a Samaritan? Is it significant that Jesus chooses not to censure the Samaritan for his non-Jewish beliefs?
4. Discuss John Calvin’s observation,

Though the *nine lepers* derived no advantage to salvation from the cure of the flesh, but only obtained a temporary gift by means of a fleeting and transitory faith, yet this figure points out to us the great efficacy which will attend true faith.

How might this passage relate to Jesus’ statements about the coming of the kingdom (17:20-21)?
5. BBT draws much from the Samaritan’s not checking in with the priests as commanded:

thanksgiving rose up from somewhere so deep inside him that it turned him around, changed his direction, led him to Jesus, made him well?

In contrast, Calvin thinks “that it was not till he had heard the decision of the priests that he returned to give thanks.”

Did Luke intended us to pit gratitude against obedience?

6. How does BBT’s anecdote of the prayerful stranger relate to the Samaritan? How does the stranger make her feel? (See the fourth paragraph from the end.)
7. Taylor writes,

...what has become apparent in the meantime is that I know how to be obedient but I do not know how to be in love.

She continues to contrast rule-following believers (as she characterizes herself) with the one she describes as a rule-breaking, risk-taking outsider. Whether or not you find this a valid lesson from the passage in Luke, how does her angst resonate with you? Are you a rule-follower? If so, is there something you are missing?

NEXT TIME: “THE OPPOSITE OF RICH”