

# *Will I Return?*

by

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

This is one of those accounts in scripture that the empathy in our humanness should feel something. We should feel the relief and joy for those ten lepers who were healed. We should then embrace their response based on our own way we think we would handle a blessing such as they received from God. So the question for you today is would you be the one who came back, or would you be like the other nine? If you came back, what would motivate you to do so? I think most of us would like to think we would be the one who did come back, and thankfulness would be our motivator. But don't be surprised if you discover, like me, that you are like the nine who went their merry way. Why do I say this? It is because I do it everyday when I fail to remember what my King has delivered me from, and also those disastrous things He has kept from me, and I didn't realize. Every now and then I think back on some pretty desperate times, and breathe out a whisper, *"Oh my King, I am grateful that you delivered me from that situation."* Or, my prayer of thanksgiving might be recognizing that God has kept us secure in His loving care. But, when I get it right, it is when I pray back a sincere response, *"Help me Lord to encourage someone today to not give up, but like me, find his or her hope in you."* When I do this I realize that I am "going back," and showing Jesus my appreciation, and I am seeing things as they should be seen.

Then there are times when I am one of the nine. I am one of those guys when I get so busy with life and activities that I fail to be an encourager to people who are desperate, and who need the hope that Jesus gives, and that I could convey from my own experiences with Him. When I fail to remember that I too was once desperate for God's help and He reached out to me and touched me with His love and help, I find myself walking with the nine. I have to remember that Jesus reached me though people who loved me toward Christ, by connecting God's blessings to them and seeing it as a sacred responsibility to help me when I was discouraged. They *"went back"* to Jesus by encouraging me, and by using their words and their loving deeds to give me hope. Through these people I have been given living examples of people who were once hurt deeply, and who went through desperate times, but were rescued by their King. These people then served me like I was the most important person in their life, and in doing so they became the hands, feet and voice of Jesus to me. They are examples of the leper who came back, and I know first hand how their

gratitude to God ministered to me. These saints have been part of my past and my present day, and they bless me greatly to this day. They are living reminders of God's love for me. Therefore as a man who was a "leper," can I be anything less for another person, or be anything other than one of the nine who didn't return if I do not serve another? I want to be the one who went back. Do you?

There's another story within this story, as most of the bible stories reveal. You may know this already, but it would be good to make note of it. It does not go without recognition that again we see a Samaritan being the guy doing something right, such as the *Good Samaritan* who was the hero in one of Jesus's parables. In this true life account there were ten lepers, and one of them was for sure a Samaritan, or in Jesus' words, a "foreigner." The nine were likely practicing Jews, or as much as a leper could be during that time. The problem they had, even in their own nation, and their own religion, they were treated as outcasts. There was little compassion for these hurting men. Still, even though they were miraculously healed, these nine men weren't thankful enough to return to Jesus. Why is this, for there may be a lesson for you and me to understand that applies to us?

I believe this is where the story within the story reveals itself. I believe what is being seen here is that the correctness they felt by being of the Jewish religion, as is the case with any of the other religions in the world including religious Christians, doesn't create truly thankful people. Now understand that I think Christianity should not be seen as a religion, but rather a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and this is why I make this statement. But I also question that many religious Christians around the world, even though they identify with our faith, really know Christ, **for they do not have a relationship with Him**. The point being, religion does not produce a thankful spirit within us. Only a personal relationship with Christ can produce this. With this in mind, I ask you to think about my next observation.

With all the different religions of the world, how many of their representatives have you observed who are truly thankful to God for what they have been given, or do they think they have earned it because of their piety or efforts? Can you think of anyone? Instead, don't you see these representatives of their god to view people who are impoverished, or diseased as having brought it on themselves and deserving of their fate? That is how the ten lepers were viewed, for they were excluded from society, and even the religious people that represented their faith. Why is this? I've observed that many religious people feel obligated to serve their god for several different reasons, other than the love of Christ, and for what he has done for us. Because of this they lack a key understanding about the grace of God. Instead, they are terribly frightened of their god, and they bow and pray, and intimidate other people into submission to make them worship their god. They kill and mutilate in the name of their god. They even mutilate themselves. But, they have no real security in their god's love. They have no real security with where they will spend eternity. They serve a heartless god, and as a result they reflect what this god represents, and they become heartless. Think about the religions of the world. How many do you think of who are feeding the hungry? How many are clothing the poor? How many are rushing in after disasters to give hope to the hopeless, to bind up the wounded, to strengthen the weak, to drill fresh water wells and to make available good water after they leave. These are things that truly grateful people do, for these people are like the one healed leper who "comes back" to Jesus to thank Him, by acts of kindness that they give to others. Another question is how many of those religions around the world do you see using their wealth to lift their own poor and disadvantaged out of poverty? Are any of them doing this? I haven't seen it. But I have seen countless number of Christians throughout history who represents their King by the way they love and they serve people around the globe, and it is not because

their religion motivates them. It is their relationship with the One who has lifted them up, and Who put them on solid ground that makes them reach out to help the person behind them to get him or her to that solid ground.

We can have a government that sees itself as benevolent to needy people, and we can have governmental leaders who seek to be our conscience to get the tasks done, but their efforts will be futile if the people's heart is not right. We cannot legislate morality, nor can we legislate benevolence, nor can we tax people to the point that they serve with a desire to do so. If we try to do it, our bureaucratic effort will always become corrupted, and we will fail in our mission. But a spirit of thankfulness in our people can inspire morality and conscience like this, and this conscience will infect the world around us to be a better place. But, we must settle on one big truth, and never try to leave it out of the equation. This truth is Jesus, and how He creates men and women who want to return to Him with their appreciation for what he has done for them, by the way they treat others. So my closing question to you is will you return to Him with your thanksgiving? Will you be the leper who comes back?