

When we come to Jesus, do we see him as he is? Or do we see him the way that we want to see him, the way that we want him to be? You might not think that there's much difference between the two, but it actually makes all the difference in the world. Because when we come to Jesus as he is, we can give thanks in every circumstance. We can praise him for every single one of his mercies, no matter what might be going on in our lives. But when we come to Jesus as we want him to be, then we end up eventually turning away from him, because we treat him as a means to an end. So it makes all the difference in the world, Christians, whether we approach him as he is or as we want him to be. Because faith approaches Jesus as he is and gives thanks for all the things that he has done.

That's what we see going on here in our Gospel lesson for today, from Luke chapter 17. Because in it we meet 10 men, 10 lepers to be exact. And these lepers come to Jesus asking him to heal them. "Jesus, Master," they say, "have mercy on us!" Now, leprosy, of course, in those days, as you might remember, is any number of skin diseases, very serious skin diseases. But they don't have hospitals. They don't have medicines. They don't have doctors to help them take care of it. So the only way that these lepers can find relief is by being separated from everybody else. Taking them away from their homes, taking them away from their families, setting them out off by themselves in the wilderness, and anybody who comes near they have to warn to stay away. So these lepers, then, come to Jesus, and they're saying to him, "Have mercy! We're tired. We're tired of this being separated. We're tired of being kept away from other people. We want to go back to the way things were. We want everything to be normal again. Help us, Jesus! Help us to get back to our families, to our towns, to our society, to the way things were."

And Christians, when we also are facing our difficult times in this life, it is good to pray to Jesus, to ask him for help in these things. We should imitate the lepers in this case, bringing to him every single one of our petitions, because Jesus is the one who can do something about it. And Jesus is the one who hears our prayers when we pray to him. So it is good, then, to pray and to ask him for help in these things.

And Jesus does answer their prayer here. And he does it in a rather remarkable way. Because he says to them, "Go. Show yourselves to the priests." Now you have to understand, in the Old Testament whenever a leper was healed of his disease, the Law told him to go to the priest. And the priest would look him over and inspect him the way that a doctor would today. And he would be the one who would declare him clean. The priest would say, "You are healed. You are clean. You can go back home. You can go back and be a part of your family again." But what makes this interesting here is that Jesus tells them to go even before they're healed. He hasn't healed them yet. He hasn't taken away their leprosy yet. He simply tells them, "Trust me. Go to the priest, and he will pronounce you clean." And that's exactly what these lepers do. They trust him. They trust that he is going to keep his word. And so they go in that trust to the priests, expecting fully to be cleansed.

And would that we also had that kind of trust, Christians! Trust that God will keep his word, trust that God will do all of these things. When Jesus promises us something, he will do it. He will not fail. And for that reason, like the lepers here, we can go even when it seems contrary to our thinking and to our expectations. To go and trust God that he will do what he says he will do. So trust him, Christians, and believe him, because he keeps his word.

But as they're going, they're healed. And now the remarkable thing happens, because all 10 of them together see that they are healed. And all 10 of them together realize that Jesus has kept his word. But nine of them continue on, going to the priest just like Jesus commanded them to. But only one turns around and goes back to Jesus, praising God and giving thanks. And the reason for that, Christians, the difference between them is exactly what we're talking about today. The nine go to Jesus and see him as they want to see him. But the one sees him as he is.

The nine see him the way that they want to see him, because they only see him as a way of fixing problems. They have a problem. They are separated from their family, kept away from their homes and everything that they held dear, because of their disease. And they want things to go back to normal. They want things to be set right again. And they know Jesus can do it. They know he has the power to do it. And so they come to him and say, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," because they know he can solve problems. But they only come to him for that reason. And once he has solved their problem, once they can go home again, is it any wonder that they simply forget him? He's done exactly what they wanted him to do. They don't need him anymore.

Christians, I think we fall into this temptation too. Whenever we come to God as a way of solving our problems, as a way of taking care of the cares and concerns of this life, as if he was just a way to get out of this problem and then we could get back to the way things ought to be. When we treat him simply as a problem solver, someone who we turn to in our last, you know, when we don't have any other option, I think what we'll find is that it's very difficult to give him thanks when he does the things that we want him to do.

Take, for example, if we have problems going on in our family, and we pray to Jesus and we say, "Jesus, help me out! Help me fix this problem. Help things to be calm again. Bring peace to my family. Give me the things that I want." And if Jesus does fix those problems, how do you react? Do you say thank you? Or do you simply move on? Because now things are the way you think that they should be again. Or when we're dealing with sickness, for example, and we pray to Jesus and say, "Jesus, please heal me," and he does. Do you give him thanks? Or do we turn away from him and say, "Well, I'm healthy now. I can get back to work. You know, thanks God. I got stuff to do." Or when we see the troubles that are going on in this nation, and the turmoil that we are experiencing politically and socially, and we pray to God and say, "God, put things right again! Why can't it be like I remember all those years ago?" Let's say he did set it right. Would we give him thanks and remember the things that he has done for us?

Because when we turn away from him, Christians, and forget to give him thanks, we are treating him simply as our expectations. We want him to take care of something. He has. And so frankly, we may not have a use for him anymore. I mean, of course, we're going to keep him around. I mean, after all, we're going to have more problems that need fixing. But why do we only come to him when it seems like there's something to fix?

And what if he didn't give us the things that we want? Would that make us impatient? Would that make us wonder what's taking him so long? Why can't he just do the thing that I wanted him to do? I've prayed about it. Why can't he just give it to me? But treating him in this way makes

him something less than what he actually is. It treats him simply as a problem solver. One who's going to fix the thing so we can get back to the way things we think should be.

And the worst part about it, Christians, is that he doesn't even have to be God in this sense to solve our problems. He doesn't even have to be the Son of God in order to take care of the things going on in our lives. It could be anything that we would turn to for help.

I mean, let's take, for example, family problems. Maybe we'll say, "Okay, we'll take care of it ourselves. Or we'll go to some kind of counselor, and they'll be the ones to help us work through this." And so we forget in all of that to pray. Or maybe we're sick, and we go to the doctor and say, "The doctor will give me the medicines that I need. The doctor will give me the procedure that I need that will give me this healing." And we forget to ask God for healing in the first place. Or with all the problems going on in this nation, and we turn to politicians. Politicians who made great promises to fix things, to set things right again. And we say, as long as we got the right man in office, it might take awhile, but at least we'll get back to the way things should be. While forgetting that God is the one who has all things in his hands. That is the problem with this way of thinking, Christians, that ultimately it treats Jesus as something less than what he actually is. And we may even seek our own help, our own doings as a way of solving our problems, only turning to God, finally, when we feel like we have no options left.

And what makes all of this worse, Christians, is that the nine should have known better. They should have known that Jesus was in fact something more than a problem solver. They should have known that he was in fact something more than simply one who is going to get them out of their current predicament. They should have seen him as the King that he is. But they don't. And so they turn away from him after he has done exactly what they want him to do. Because after all, we don't thank doctors for doing their job. We don't thank politicians for keeping their promises. So why would we thank Jesus for just doing what we expected him to do?

But one is different in all of this. One turns to him by faith and comes and gives thanks for the things that he has done. And Jesus tells us that this man was a Samaritan. Samaritans are not Israelites. They are not Jews. They do not know God. They were ones who were separated from Israel. I mean, yes, they had part of the Bible. But even the part that they had was corrupted and completely different from our own. This was a man who we would not expect to know God. This was a man who we would not expect to come to God in faith. And yet he does. He comes to him, praising with a loud voice and giving thanks to Jesus as the one who has set him free. Because this one man out of all 10 of them sees Jesus for who he actually is. He sees him as the King. He sees him as the one who has all things in his hands. And because he sees Jesus rightly, he also knows that everything that Jesus has given to him, he doesn't deserve. Because he's separated by his leprosy. And he's separated by being a Samaritan from the promises of God. But Jesus shows him mercy anyway. Is it any wonder, then, that he cries out in joy and can't help but thank God for the mercy shown to him which he knows he did not deserve?

And that's the joyful thing about faith, Christians. Faith is able to rejoice in God for his mercies, even in those moments when God doesn't answer things the way that we might like. When we have troubles in our family, for example, and we pray to God to fix it, and he doesn't, at least in the way that we expect him to, we can still rejoice. Rejoice knowing that we have a Father in

heaven, who is great over all things and who will take care of us no matter what! When we pray to God for healing and he doesn't give it to us in the way that we expect, we know that he has promised us a greater blessing than anything we can imagine. Something far greater than eye has seen or ear has heard for those who have loved him, a blessing and a paradise beyond our expectations. Even if we suffer now, God will give us far more than we have lost in this life. And Christians, with all of the things going on in the nation today, if we pray to God that he would set it all right again, and he doesn't, at least not in the way that we expect--in fact, if everything came crashing down tomorrow so that there was no more nation, so that the world that we knew was completely gone--God would still go on forever. Because God is the one who is the King of all history. God is the one who is the master of all things. God will take care of us. And even if heaven and earth pass away, the Lord and his Word will never pass away. We have a promise far greater than anything this world can give us.

So Christians, if we have treated Jesus simply as we want him to be, we should ask for forgiveness, ask that we would see him as he is. Not to treat him simply as a way of fixing problems, but as the Lord of all things. And Jesus who is faithful, Jesus who does keep his promises, will forgive our sins and restore us, so that we will see him as he is: the King, our master, and the Lord of all things to whom all things belong and in whose hand all things are. So trust in him, Christians, and give thanks to him for his mercies that he shows to you every single day.

To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.