

Episode: Luke Series No. 16

Narrator: Tenth Leper and Young Ruler

Primary Scriptures: Luke 17, 18:1-34

Story Summary: Healing of the ten lepers, the young ruler

Location: Galilee and Judea

Time: Circa 30 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Luke 17:1-2, 17:4, 18:1, 18:14, 18:23-24

Leprosy has historically been one of the most feared diseases. Although people did not understand about germs or bacteria until relatively recently, they did know leprosy was communicable, so lepers have always been shunned and separated from their communities and families.

Leprosy was not just a skin disease that appeared like severe acne or sebaceous cysts—it caused horrible deformities. Since their flesh literally rotted away, lepers often lost fingers, toes, noses, or other appendages. In past times, when people did not often live long enough to deal with heart issues and cancer, leprosy was a greatly feared disease. God instructed the Jews to separate lepers so their disease would not spread. This was a devastating development for people used to living with intimate relationships in close communities.

The complete opposite of being a leper was to be a rich, young ruler. There were few rich people in the Jewish society, and wealth was often correlated with being righteous. How could it be any better than to be young, rich, "righteous," and the boss? The young ruler and Jesus knew that there was something better...being truly righteous in God's eyes, not man's.

In Luke 17:20, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. The Pharisees could have been referring to a time when the Romans would leave Israel and a Davidic kingdom would be established. They could have been referring to a future time when God and the Jews would enjoy a blissful existence together as they ruled over all other kingdoms. Whatever kingdom they were referring to most likely had to do with the Jews receiving special blessings.

Jesus told the Pharisees that the kingdom would not be physical, but that the kingdom was already in their midst. No doubt the Pharisees were clueless about his meaning. Then Jesus gave his disciples much more information about God's coming kingdom, but even then the disciples were probably as confused as the Pharisees. They could not fathom a situation where the Messiah would go away, be rejected, and then revealed.

Discussion Questions:

1. Leprosy has been discovered to be caused by bacteria. Why would it have struck rich people and poor people?
 2. The tenth leper was a Samaritan, a people group despised by the Jews. Do you think that made much of a difference to the other nine lepers who were probably Jewish?
 3. Explain the people's reaction in Luke 18:26.
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1. Bacteria can be transmitted in many methods. Even rich people would have been in contact with crowds at the Temple, at the market, in the streets, and may have been served by infected people. 2. Unlikely to have made much of a difference because leprosy trumped all other social issues. 3. The people believed riches were an evidence of righteousness. If riches are only acquired by righteous people, then rich people should go straight into the kingdom. Jesus destroyed that perception.

Application Questions:

1. Who do you compare yourself to in order to determine whether you are financially wealthy? How does your choice of comparison impact your perception of your financial wealth?
2. If Jesus asked you to give up all of your financial wealth, what would you do? How would you know if Jesus is asking you to do so?
3. The rich young ruler thought righteousness was equivalent to following rules. Do you sometimes feel the same way, that maybe you can be more righteous if you just follow more rules or quit doing certain things? Why did Jesus want him to give all of his possessions to the poor? [to make him dependent on God instead of his riches, to show him what total obedience and commitment are, to help the poor]
4. Explain how Luke 17:1-2 might apply to you.

Applications Questions for Teens:

1. In the parable of the Unworthy Servants, Luke 17:10 indicates that no matter how hard you work for God, you are just doing your duty. Explain why that is good news. (being a faithful servant of God is enough)
2. What is your favorite possession? How hard would it be for you to give it up?
3. Your age group tends to have its own "lepers," people who are never part of the crowd. Have you ever been that person? How can you work to include people in your community?