

(Luke) 42 - Encouraging Faith

by Ed Miller

The sermon emphasizes the dual aspects of salvation as grace from God and faith from humanity, highlighting the importance of encouraging faith in others.

Duration: 50:21

Scripture: Luke 17:1-6, Luke 17:10-19

Topics: "Genuine Obedience", "Christian Gratitude"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of true obedience from the heart. He uses the story of the ten lepers to illustrate this point. While all ten lepers obeyed Jesus' command to go show themselves to the priest, only one of them truly obeyed from the heart by returning to give thanks and worship Jesus. The preacher also highlights the significance of forgiveness and encourages believers to have a forgiving spirit, as it can discourage faith. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the need for genuine obedience and gratitude in the Christian life.

Transcript

Luke chapter 17. Luke chapter 17. We're in the bottom section of what we are calling the teaching of the Son of all mankind.

For the sake of analysis, we've divided this great teaching ministry all the way from chapter 9 now, and it'll go through chapter 18. The first ten verses of 18. And we've divided it up into topics.

I won't review all of those topics, but we've come to the final topic. The topic of salvation. As I understand it, this topic begins in chapter 14 and goes all the way to chapter 17, 10.

So we're right at the end of that great topic. We looked at chapter 14. What does salvation mean to man? And then we looked at chapter 15.

What does salvation mean to God? And then we looked at chapter 16 last time. The heart, the core of salvation is relationship. You know, the Pharisees, they were all involved in the rules and the external, but they didn't get that relationship.

That brings us this morning to the end of that great topic on salvation, and we're calling it the climax of salvation. Chapter 17, 1 to 10. Sort of the bottom line, the mean.

Now, let me answer the question right up front in case I run off on a rabbit trail and get lost on the way and you say, well, what was that all about? Well, I'll tell you right up front. There's a double answer to what we call the climax of salvation. From God's point of view, viewing it from heaven, the answer is grace.

The grace of God. That's the climax of salvation. But then if you come down to earth and you look at it on the human side, the answer is faith.

On our side, it's faith. On God's side, it's grace. Follow along, please, as I read from chapter 17, and we'll look at the first ten verses.

And he said unto his disciples, It is impossible but that the occasion of stumbling should come. Woe to him through whom they come! It were better for him if a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were thrown into the sea, rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble. Take heed to yourself, if thy brother sin, rebuke him.

If he repent, forgive him. And if he sin against thee seven times in a day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him. And the apostle said unto him, Lord, increase our faith.

And the Lord said, If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would say unto this sycamore tree, be uprooted and be planted in the sea, and it would obey you. We'll leave the parable that follows and we'll read that in another connection. Now to get the impact of Jesus' comment in verses 1 and 2, we need to identify who does he mean by one of these little ones.

Is he talking about children? Is he saying, woe to him that offends little children? I think that's included, but I think there's a spiritual side. Now listen, as a quote, the sister reference in Matthew. In other words, Matthew tells the same thing Luke tells, but Matthew adds one little phrase that identifies the little ones.

Listen, as a quote, Matthew 18 says, But whoso shall cause one of these little ones who believe in me to be offended, it were better for him that a millstone were tied about his neck. So who are the little ones? And the answer is the little ones are those who believe in him. The little ones who believe in me.

In other words, Christians are little ones. You believe in the Lord? You're a little one. Do I believe in the Lord? I'm a little one.

Little ones are those that have faith in the Lord. Now he said it's inevitable that stumbling blocks are going to come and trip up little ones. Trip up those who believe in the Lord.

But woe to them, he says, through whom they come. Now in the context, what is a stumbling block? Now I'm not looking for an illustration, because we can go to Corinthians and all and have a lot of illustrations of stumbling blocks. But what's the definition of a stumbling block? And in the context, I think it's this.

Anything that discourages the faith of a little one. That's what a stumbling block is. If in any way I discourage your faith, I've been a stumbling block.

If you discourage my faith, you've been a stumbling block. Anything that hinders faith is a stumbling block. The Lord Jesus comes to this climax of the message of salvation.

It's not surprising on the level of earth that He homes in on this great topic of faith. See, nothing blesses God more than having little ones trust Him. I mean, that's what it's all about.

He just wants little ones to put their faith in Him. A glance please at verse 2, 17-2, and see what a powerful picture of speech this is. It were better for Him if a millstone were hanged about His neck, and He were thrown into the sea, rather than that He should cause one of the little ones to stumble.

Let me show you a couple of things from that passage that show what a powerful figure of speech it really is. In the original language, you don't see it in the English, but there's actually two different words for millstone. One of the words is, it refers to a hand-held millstone.

The women would use it, children would use it in the home to grind up the grain. And it was not all that heavy. I suppose it weighed as much as a cinder block or something, but it was a small millstone.

And then there's another Greek word that describes the big millstone that was so large, animals had to draw it around. It was a big stone, and animals, donkeys would be tied to it, mules, and they would have to go around the circle. That's the Greek word that He's using.

That millstone, what a powerful figure of speech. It would have been bad enough to have the little millstone tied around your neck. But to have Him use this animal-drawn millstone, probably 80 or 100 pounds at least, tied around your neck.

That's just a powerful figure of speech. And then in verse 2, to add to the figure, He says, it's not only that you've got that thing tied around your neck, but then you're thrown into the sea. I wouldn't want to be thrown into a pond with a cinder block tied around my neck.

I just can't imagine what He's getting at. What a powerful expression. This heavy millstone tied around your neck and drowned in the sea.

And Matthew makes it even stronger. Because Matthew in chapter 18 says, not thrown into the sea, but into the depths of the sea. So here you have someone thrown into the middle of the ocean with this huge millstone tied around your neck.

To make it even stronger, in verse 2, now that's a terrible picture. I don't know what registers in your mind, but having that big old thing tied around your neck and taken out to the middle of the ocean and just thrown overboard. Then He says, that's better.

It would be better for you if that would happen. I can't imagine what the alternative is. If that's better than the alternative, you just get to see what a strong figure of speech.

Now if drowning that way is to be preferred over whatever woe He has in His mind, you can imagine what that woe must be. And what's the effect? Some little one was hindered from trusting Jesus. Isn't that precious? Some little one.

Somebody discouraged somebody's faith. And that so upset God because somebody discouraged someone else from trusting the Lord. He said it would be a lot better for that man to have a mule-drawn millstone tied around his neck.

He'd be taken out into the middle of the ocean and drown in the depths of the sea. That would be better. And so you see what a powerful passage that is.

Now this passage, there are many passages in the Bible. Some make minor contributions to your life. Some make major contributions to your life.

Some haven't touched you yet. Hang in there. God will deal with you in terms of all of His words.

This passage has made a major contribution to my life and ministry because it helps me to understand how God feels about little ones who trust in Him. As you know, when I teach, I try to avoid controversial issues. One reason, of course, I don't have the answers.

But another reason is I want to encourage faith. And I think sometimes dealing with those controversial issues that discourages faith. And I try to give common denominator truth.

And I ask the Lord to help me be a unifying influence in the body of Christ rather than a dividing influence and so on. I ever want to encourage little ones to trust Jesus. And I always ask the Lord to help me with that.

If in any way I can help you trust Jesus, that's my heart. That's really what I want to do. Someone says, the most important thing you can do when you teach is to give sound doctrine.

Well, I hope I give sound doctrine. But that's not the important thing. You can have sound doctrine until you're sound asleep.

You can have sound doctrine in an academic way so that you know all the right answers and you miss the Lord. The main measure of my teaching is not, is it sound doctrine? Did I present all the points? Did I use good illustration? Did I relate it to all the other truths? Did I give the balance of truth? That's not what I look for. I ask the Lord, did I encourage faith today? Did I help some little one to take a forward step in his trusting of the Lord Jesus? And I think that's what this passage is all about.

And what good is it to take this, for example, chapter 14, to say this is how salvation applies to man. Chapter 15, this is how salvation applies to God. Chapter 16, this is the heart of salvation.

Relationship. What good is it to know all that if you don't trust Jesus? It's no good at all. And so that's the whole point.

We've got to trust Him. And so as He comes to the end, He puts the spotlight on the importance of childlike faith. I honestly pray as we gather together week by week, that that's one of the things God accomplishes for you and me.

That we all go forward in childlike faith. That's one of the main reasons we gather together. Now, glance if you would at verse 3 and 4. He's not just going to give a truth and leave it unapplied.

So now He's going to apply it. Take heed to yourself. If thy brother sinned, rebuke him.

If he repents, forgive him. If he sinned against thee seven times in a day, and seven times turn again to thee saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him. We're told to encourage faith and not to be a stumbling block for the little ones.

Then He gives a practical illustration of one way to discourage faith. One way to discourage faith, and it's a powerful illustration, is by an unforgiving spirit. If you offend me in some way, of course, it's a sin to offend, it's a sin to be offended.

I'm not to cause stumbling, but I'm not to stumble either. If you offend me and then you ask for forgiveness, I don't give it. I've discouraged your faith, and it's better for me that a millstone were tied

about my neck, and I'd be drowned in the depths of the sea.

Scholars tell us that the use of the number seven in this verse is probably symbolic. Forgive seven times. In other words, take it to be literal.

If it were literal, that would be a great thing. Someone comes and sins against you seven times in the same day. To forgive is one plus six, eight minus one.

That would be a hard thing. But probably this is that number used in the sense of completeness. You get that same idea in Matthew 18 where you get that parable.

Remember, Peter came to the Lord Jesus. How often shall I forgive? You know, the rabbis used to teach three or four times. That's what the rabbis thought.

How often should I forgive? Three or four times. Well, Peter thought that he was very magnanimous by adding it together. And so he took the three and four and added it.

He said, how often, Lord? Seven times. And then the Lord said, seven times seventy. Now, he wasn't saying 490.

He was saying an unlimited number of times. And over and over you'll see that number seven meaning just an unlimited thing. Let's look at it in its weakest form to get the point of it.

Let's take it literally. I speak as a fool, but let's just say that it's literal. It's not a figure of speech meaning an unlimited number of times.

Let's say before breakfast some brother spread rumors about me. I'll use myself because that way I won't get in touch. Spread rumors about me and said that I have been unfaithful to Lillian.

That would be a terrible thing. That would wound my heart so much. Two people I love in the universe, I'll tell you.

One is the Lord and one is Lillian. The Lord doesn't have a lot of preferences about a lot of things. Lillian does.

And so since I don't have to please him on certain things, he said, I don't care. And Lillian said, I care. So I have to go with her.

But if that rumor came, oh, that would hurt me. And then he came and said, I've done this and I want your forgiveness. I suppose the first time I might say, well, you know, it's under the blood and I'm going to trust God to give me grace on this.

It's okay. But then after that, let's say an hour later, he did it again and he started spreading that rumor. And then he came back to me and said, you know, I've started spreading that again and I just want you to forgive me.

I might bite my lip and my tongue to a stump and I'd probably say, all right, you know, don't do that anymore. And then just before lunch I heard that he called up the local newspaper and he spread that thing in the paper. And then he came back at lunch and said, you know, I did this again.

Would you please forgive me for this? Then he called the TV. You can take care of that. That's only four times.

That's not seven. I don't know about you, that's not in me to forgive that many times. And that's only literal.

Imagine if he did that thing all day long and then kept coming back saying, please forgive me, please forgive me. It wouldn't be in my heart to do that. And it wasn't in the disciple's heart either.

What Jesus was actually saying is if somebody sins against you a thousand times a day, every day of the week, every week of the year, every month, all year long, you're to forgive them an unlimited number of times. And so they respond. Look at the response in verse 5. And the apostle said to the Lord, increase our faith.

Well, you can understand why they said that. What an impossible standard he sets before them. They saw the impossibility of what Jesus was saying and so they said, increase our faith.

I need more faith, larger faith, stronger faith, increased faith. Now, if we're going to understand the heart of what God is saying, we need to understand this next part about the mustard seed. If you have the faith of a mustard seed, you could say to the mulberry tree, be uprooted and be cast into the sea.

Why did Jesus give this illustration? You see, at first it looks like He's saying, you need mustard seed faith. I don't think He's saying that. I don't think He's saying you need mustard seed faith so that you can work miracles.

He's not saying pray for mustard seed faith. The reality is that faith is not the issue. What He's saying is this.

You're asking for increased faith. Don't answer. Just say it.

Have any of you ever thought or prayed, Lord, increase my faith. I need more faith. I need stronger faith.

I'm so weak in faith. I did that for years. You realize the Bible teaches that faith does not grow.

Faith does not increase. Faith does not get stronger. In every case where someone asks for faith to be increased, there's a mild rebuke by the Lord.

And what He's saying in effect is this. Faith is nothing. That's why a mustard seed faith will do.

Because faith is nothing. The important thing about faith is the object of your faith. What are you trusting? A little faith lays hold of a great Savior.

And it's the object of your faith to forgive an unlimited number of times. Boy, I need faith for that. No, you don't.

You need God for that. I don't need faith for that. I need God for that.

And a little faith. Faith doesn't do impossible things. Faith lays hold of God who does impossible things.

And then God can do the impossible. My mother used to have these blockages. She's very generous.

She passed that on genetically so that we have it too. But she had these blockages in her legs. And oh how she had such pain when she walked.

She just hardly could walk at all. But she would go up seven flights of stairs before she would take an elevator. She had this claustrophobia or that's what we think it was.

But the way she would express it is I don't trust elevators. I don't trust elevators. So what does she need? More trust.

That doesn't help. She's as safe as the elevator is safe. You're as safe as what you trust.

She didn't need more faith. A little faith would have done it. She had other problems than that.

One of my daughters. Kathy. I think some of you know Kathy.

She can't stand an airplane. She trembles. She does not enjoy the trip.

The whole time she's just in terror. And when it lands, when it takes off, when it's going, when it hits an airplane. Does she need more faith? She doesn't need more faith.

She's as safe as the airplane is safe. What's your trusting? Let's say there's ice and a pond freezes. And that ice will hold a hundred pounds.

I weigh more than a hundred pounds. I weigh more than two hundred pounds. How much faith would it take for me to walk on ice that holds a hundred pounds? You see, all the faith in the world is not going to help.

If I had all the faith in the world, I'm going to sink. Because your faith is only as strong as the object in which you trust. Now here's an amazing thing.

God has called me to encourage your faith. You know how I have to encourage your faith? I have to encourage your faith by turning your eyes away from your faith. To Christ, the object of your faith.

The worst thing you can do is trust your faith. A lot of people have faith in their faith. If I have more faith, if I have more trust.

I like that Francis Habergail in that wonderful poem she wrote. Commit your faith to Him and trust to Him your trust. And you've got to just give your faith over to the Lord.

Because it's Christ that we need to trust. I thought faith too was the secret of living the Christian life. And if I had more faith, then I could do more impossible things.

But faith is only great as the object in which you're trusting. In verse 6, He uses this illustration of the mulberry tree commanding this tree to be uprooted. That's an impossible thing.

Say, if you had only that much faith, you could go to a mulberry tree. Now, do you have that much faith? I think you do. What would happen if you went to a mulberry tree? They'd be uprooted and cast into the sea.

Another illustration talks about casting a mountain into the sea if you had that much faith. Say, it doesn't work. It doesn't work.

I had that much faith. I tried. It doesn't work.

I wonder if you have tried. You know, secretly when nobody's looking. Sometimes you apply these things.

You know, you go out there and cast into the sea. Nobody's looking and so nobody knows. But you try to be spiritual and apply those things.

The point is this. He gives this parable. Look at verse 7. Which of you having a slave, plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he comes in from the field, come immediately, sit down and eat.

Will he not say, prepare something for me to eat and properly clothe yourself and serve me till I've eaten and drunk. Afterward, you eat and drain. He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things that are commanded, say, we're unworthy slaves.

We've done only what we were expected or what we ought to have done. His point is, it's the nature of a slave to serve. That's his nature.

That's what he's supposed to do. And it's the nature of faith to lay hold of Christ who does impossible things. I remember in my early Christian life, poor Lillian, what she went through as God began to try to teach me some of these things.

But I used to always run after byproducts. I would run after peace and run after power and run after gifts and run after faith and all that kind of thing. Because I didn't know all I needed was Christ.

And if I have Christ, I have peace and I have power and patience and faith. It's unscriptural to pray for those things. What we need is a greater vision of the Lord.

I love to illustrate this with that woman who reached out and touched the hem of the garment of the Lord. Remember that? Oh, what faith! Well, think about it. If someone touched the hem of your clothing, would you feel it? If they just touched the hem, you probably wouldn't even notice it.

It'd be imperceptible. You didn't have a lot of faith. Jesus touched his garment.

The point is, how sensitive is Jesus? He felt that. He felt that. And the point of all of this is Jesus is so sensitive when you come as a little one and put your faith in Him.

He's the great Savior. And He's the one that can do it. Verse 10.

When you do all that's commanded, you say, we're unworthy slaves. Let's say literally. I speak again as a fool.

Let's say somebody did sin against me seven times, as I suggest. And then seven times in a row, I said, I forgive you. I forgive you.

I forgive you. Wouldn't I feel spiritual at the end of the day? Boy, I really did something. I forgave that scoundrel seven times in a row.

And look what he did to me. God is saying, after you have done everything that you're supposed to do, then just say, I'm unprofitable. That was expected of me.

You know the commandment that you're supposed to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. None of us have done that, have we? I haven't. Let's say you did that.

After you've done that, you say, I'm unprofitable. That was what was expected. Let's say that we could go to heaven and go up to an angel that has never sinned.

He's probably been up there a billion years. He's never sinned. And I were to suggest to that angel, because you have never sinned, you deserve to be in God's holy heaven.

That angel would take his wings and cover his face and look at me in horror. He would think that I'm blaspheming, suggesting that he deserves to be there. That angel would say, I'm an unprofitable slave.

I'm only doing what I was created to do. God created me to do this. I don't deserve to be here.

You see, we can't merit with God unless we can exceed duty. If you can get beyond what you're expected to do, all right, let me give you your duty. Be perfect.

As your Father in heaven is perfect. And if you could do that, when you're done, say, I'm an unprofitable slave. That's what's expected of me.

See, we can't exceed duty. We'll never deserve heaven. We fall short of duty.

And so we deserve hell. And that's where the mercy and the grace of God comes in. But we can never exceed duty.

Now, one of the greatest enemies, I think, of humility is success in Christian service. Now, that's a terrible thing if you're successful. It doesn't have to be, but sometimes it is because it makes you think you've done something.

It makes you feel spiritual. You realize the missionary does not deserve to be on the mission field. And the pastor doesn't deserve to be in the pulpit.

And I'll tell you, the privilege I've had these six years coming here, I don't deserve the privilege to share the unsearchable riches of Christ with you week after week. Just unprofitable service. See, impossible things in my life, I'm going to have to trust God to do.

Now, to make this practical, tie the illustration in with the application. See, the illustration is uprooting a sycamore tree or a mulberry tree and throwing it in the ocean. That's the illustration.

The application is having a forgiving spirit. What does it take for me to forgive somebody who sinned against me? Well, I say me, I mean us. Any Christian.

See, naturally, I don't know about you, naturally, I'm vindictive. If somebody does something against me, you know, it rises up and there's vengeance there and the spirit of animosity and I carry a grudge and I might look good on the outside and play the Christian game. A non-forgiving spirit is deep-rooted in my nature.

I can't forgive and forget. And you know the Bible doesn't actually tell you to forgive and forget. It tells you to forgive and remember no more.

That's not the same as forgetting. It's not bringing it up again. Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Jesus did not forget. He just willed not to remember. And God calls us to will not to remember.

But I have an unforgiving spirit naturally. What does it take to uproot that thing and cast it into the depths of the sea? See, that's his point. He's saying it is impossible.

Now faith lays hold of Christ. If you had faith, you could take that thing, uproot it and cast it into the sea. I can look to Jesus and say, Lord, this moment I'm trusting you to uproot that unforgiving spirit.

Pull it out of me and cast it into the depths of the sea. That is my only hope for a forgiving spirit. And it's your only hope for a forgiving spirit.

You say, I need more faith. No, you don't. Mustard seed size faith will do.

But make sure the object of your faith is Jesus. That's why to encourage your faith, I ask the Lord to help me show you how trustworthy Jesus is. That's why we keep talking about the Lord.

That's why we keep focusing on him. Because I know he's the object of your faith. And he's the object of my faith.

So from God's side, grace. From man's side, faith. There's trust in the Lord Jesus.

Now let me just introduce this next section and then we'll wrap it up. Verse 11. Now this section goes all the way to chapter 19, 28.

What it is, it's the end of the Parian ministry, the teaching ministry of our Lord. And what he does now is he summarizes all the subjects we've talked about. And he sort of drives them home.

It's the clincher section of the teaching ministry of the Lord. And it's not surprising that he begins with the story of the ten lepers. Because their story illustrates the proper response to God's salvation.

Now we're responding to all that we've heard of his teaching. His teaching on prayer, his teaching on missions, his teaching on discipleship, his teaching on salvation. How do we respond to all of that? And Luke, by the Holy Spirit, lays out these great eight stories that give the response to this entire ministry.

Verse 11. I think you're familiar with this wonderful story. It came about while he was on the way to Jerusalem.

He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a certain village, ten leprous men stood at a distance, met him. They raised their voices saying, Jesus Master, have mercy on us.

And when he saw them, he said to them, go show yourself to the priests. It came about as they were going, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he had been healed, turned back and glorified God with a loud voice.

Fell on his face at his feet, giving thanks to him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus answered and said, were there not ten cleansed, but the nine? Where are they? Was no one found who turned back to give glory to God except this foreigner? And he said to him, rise, go your way, your faith has made you well.

Now, we call this the first outworking of redemption or the first response to the teaching ministry of Christ. It's not surprising to me, he used leper. I won't develop it again, we've touched that before.

Leprosy is God's great picture of sin. The leper was never healed. He was cleansed.

He cleansed the leper, because it's a picture of sin. This wasn't only a leper, it was a Samaritan leper. We don't know today prejudice like they knew in the New Testament days.

This was a terrible thing. See, the Samaritan was sort of a half-breed, half-Jew and half-Gentile. And the Jews, remember in John 4, Jews had no dealing with the Samaritans.

When Herod built the temple in Jerusalem or enlarged and beautified the temple, at the same time he built another one on Mount Gerizim, sort of a rival temple for the Samaritans. Remember the woman at the well said, which temple should we worship in? One thing we get out of this is, this Samaritan, when he goes, go show yourself to the priest, you can see his heart, because he's ready to change religion. He's ready to go and show himself to the priest.

But there was a tremendous turning here. Now, in verse 14, this gives you the key to understanding this past. Jesus said, go show yourself to the priest.

A child could understand that. Of course, not maybe understand the reason for that. The reason is in Leviticus 13 and 14.

Nobody in the Old Testament that was a Jew ever applied that fact. When that leper went to the priest, he'd have to do some research. They'd say, we're here.

And he'd say, why? They hadn't applied that in 4,000 years. They didn't know what to do with that passage. The reason they went was not to get cleansed, but to prove they were cleansed.

There was a lot of tests they would go through as evidence that they had been healed. And they would go through the hair, and they would go between the toes, and they would check everything. And by the way, all you got to do is trust Christ, and you watch people start examining your life.

They'll go through your hair, through your toes, and they'll try to find something about you. But that's just a picture. So the reason Jesus said, go show yourself to the priest, prove you have been cleansed.

I've heard this thing misapplied so many times. I hear it for a Thanksgiving message. All right, Thanksgiving.

Now let's turn to the story of the ten lepers. One was thankful. Nine were not thankful.

Give me a break. These were lepers. You tell me they weren't thankful.

They were cleansed. There was no cure for this disease. They were ostracized, cut off from society, cut off from their families, cut off from the temple.

I can't believe in a million years that those nine were not thankful. They were certainly thankful. And the point is not one's thankful and the others weren't thankful.

They were thankful. The point is that there's a difference between obeying God in the spirit and obeying God in the letter. You know, you can do the letter of the thing.

Jesus said, turn the other cheek. I could turn the other cheek and miss the point. I can literally, go ahead, hit me again.

And I have vindictiveness in my heart. I missed the point. Turn the other cheek is a non-retaliatory spirit.

That's the point of that. It's like the mother in church said to the child, don't stand on the pew. Sit down.

And then the child was up again. Sit down. And the child up again.

And then so she forcibly put, sit down. And the child said, I'm standing up in my heart. That's the spirit of it.

And you can do it on the outside and miss it. Now, let me tell you their story. As far as their theology, we know nine of them were Jews.

We know they knew enough to believe Jesus would have mercy on them. Use your imagination. They're on their way to obey God.

Go show yourself to the priest. So they're going to show themselves to the priest. And on their way, it doesn't tell us how advanced it was.

My imagination goes, I think fingers grew back and noses came back and all. I just think they were cured of advanced stages of leprosy. But now here they are and they've got a problem. They're on the way obeying Jesus.

Go show yourself to the priest. All of a sudden they're healed. What are you going to do? And I hear one saying, I know what I'm going to do.

I'm going to obey God. He said, go show yourself to the priest. There's no way I'm turning back.

Because if I disobey him, I might get that leprosy back. And I'm going to the priest. That's what he said to do.

And the other nine agreed. And said, yeah, we better obey God. They were thankful all right, but they've got to obey God.

The one turned around and came back. He said, I don't know about all of that. All I know is I've got to fall down.

He healed me. I've got to thank Jesus. The one that came back obeyed the spirit of the command.

What was the command? Go give proof that you're healed. When he fell down at the feet of Jesus, when he began to worship, when he gave a loud voice of triumph, he was giving evidence. He went and showed himself to the priest.

The others went away, but they only did the letter of the thing. They obeyed, but just on the outside. And when the one came back, Jesus said, where are the nine? In other words, he expected all of them to come back.

He said, well, but they're obeying you. In order to make this practical, let me just, and show you what a summary nature this end is. Let me mention five simple principles, and I'll just sort of rattle them off.

Five observations about this story that summarize redemption. Number one, I've already mentioned it, but let me give it again. Jesus intends every Christmas, all ten lepers, to obey from the heart.

You can see that when he, you can almost see his heart. Where are the nine? I'm sort of glad the leper didn't judge. He didn't answer that.

He never gave an answer. Where are the nine? But if he had answered, you know what he would have said? They're obeying you. That's where they are.

They're not out getting drunk. They're not out running around. They're not out carousing.

You said, go show yourself to the priest. He said, where are the nine? Where do you think they are? They went to show themselves to the priest. That's what you told them to do.

And you could see the disappointment in Christ because he expected them to obey from the heart. Here's the second principle. Not only does Jesus intend for all ten to return, but the reality is only a few will ever give heart obedience.

Only a few, even of the Christian, not necessarily one out of ten, but only a remnant, only a handful, will respond from the heart. Here's the third observation. Heart obedience resembles disobedience.

That's an amazing paradox, but think about it. Picture yourself. If you didn't know this whole story and you were just sort of on a picnic and these leopards come by and you're on the side of the hill.

You hear them talk. They stop. They just got cured.

They just received this wonderful healing. And they're discussing it. And one says, Jesus said, go show yourself to the priest.

The other one said, that's what he said. It was clear. He told us, go show yourself to the priest.

And the one said, I don't care what he said. I know what I'm going to do. I'm running back to Jesus.

And you're just having a picnic, listening in. Wouldn't you think the one that returned disobeyed? Boy, those nine are smart. Boy, they're doing what Jesus said.

And they're obeying. And the one, he shouldn't do that. He's in trouble.

See, heart obedience resembles disobedience. And the more you start responding to Jesus with your heart, the more you're going to be misunderstood. And the more I start responding with my heart, the more I'm going to be misunderstood.

I remember when Christ, for seven years of my Christian life, I was such a legalist. Obeying the letter. Doing everything he said.

And going to church and joining the program and getting involved and doing everything he said. I was doing what he said. But I missed the heart.

In 1965, when I crashed in my life, my personal life, God began to dawn on me the simplicity of Christ. And I just fell at his feet. And I just worshiped the Lord.

And one of the things I did was I saw the stupidity of everything else I was doing. And so I started dropping all the programs that I was involved in. And all of a sudden, people looked at me and said, Pray for Ed.

He's backsliding. He dropped out of this and he dropped out of that and he's not doing this. I remember I was teaching at a church down here.

And I suggested, there was some, I'm not going to call names, but there's this dear family, how they love the Lord. But I think they should have been at the Little League game with their son, I think, instead of prayer meeting that night. And so I suggested that from the pulpit.

I just said, You know, some of you are coming to prayer meeting, I think you should be watching your kids play Little League instead. And the deacons got out of my case pretty bad. But they misunderstand.

I'm not saying don't be spiritual. I'm saying once you see Christ, your whole secular world becomes spiritual and everything becomes spiritual and you're misunderstood. And hard obedience resembles disobedience.

And then, the fourth principle is simply this. Hard obedience is spontaneous. This guy didn't think, well, now what's the theology? Give me a recipe.

How do I do it? All he said was, all I know is he ministered to me and I am going to pour out to him. Real Christianity is intuitive. You don't need lessons.

You don't have to take a class on what I'm supposed to do. Just love Jesus. Just do.

God has made you creator. The first picture of God in the Bible is creator. And the first change he's going to make in your life when you trust him is he's going to bring out your creativity.

You have something to give the Lord that no one else can give him in the same way. Don't try to be somebody else. Don't try to copy somebody else.

Just pour out your heart. I'm not saying you should do what this guy did and shout and fall down on your face. I don't know what it is.

Remember what Mary when she gave the ointment and she poured it. That was so embarrassing. Pour that perfume on his head, down his hair, all over his body.

The Bible says the fragrance filled the house. He wasn't embarrassed. He wore that proudly.

There's a good chance he carried that aroma to the cross with him because that's how close it was. Just be yourself and give God your heart. I'm too busy doing all the things and going here and doing that and reading that and belonging to this and involving this program and that program.

I'll tell you the barrenness of busyness can destroy you. Just go after Jesus. Just fall down.

And then the final point I'm going to make is this. Heart obedience always blesses Christ. That made him so happy.

And what's it all about? It's about responding to him. And so God intends everyone to do this. Only a handful will.

I hope everybody in this room is part of that handful. Even though heart obedience resembles disobedience and you'll be accused of being lazy and passive and disinterested and all that kind of stuff. Just do it anyway.

Heart obedience is spontaneous. And only this response blesses Jesus. Ministry is not ministering to my fellow man.

It's ministering to the heart of Jesus. It's making him happy. That results, of course, in ministering to my fellow man.

We'll close that. That's the first response of his teaching. We come back like this leper.

We fall down and we disworship him. His question remains. Where are the nine? This is Christianity.

Nothing less is. Comment the question. I'm sure they did.

And, uh... No, they were... But how many have gone with the one because God told us the story of the nine? I wonder how many rewards they'll get in heaven for that. But, yeah, we follow the rules. And we think that's the way to obey God.

But, uh... If God would only let us... It's hard to reason. Heavenly Father, we come as your... Not looking to our faith, but thanking you that we have such a great Christ. And we pray, Lord, that you would work in us those responses that are supernaturally natural and that bring us to the feet of Christ.

Thank you in advance for over-answering this prayer. We claim it in Jesus' name.

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