**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**LUKE-066**. **WHERE ARE THE NINE? by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"11. And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem, that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12. And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14. And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God. 16. And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18. There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19. And He said unto him, Arise, go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole."*

*Luke 17:11-19*

The melancholy group of lepers, met with in one of the villages on the borders of Samaria and Galilee, was made up of Samaritans and Jews, in what proportion we do not know. The common misery drove them together, in spite of racial hatred, as, in a flood, wolves and sheep will huddle close on a bit of high ground. Perhaps they had met in order to appeal to Jesus, thinking to move Him by their aggregated wretchedness; or possibly they were permanently segregated from others, and united in a hideous fellowship.

**I. We note the lepers cry and the Lord's strange reply.**

Of course they had to stand afar off, and the distance prescribed by law obliged them to cry aloud, though it must have been an effort, for one symptom of leprosy is a hoarse whisper. Sore need can momentarily give strange physical power. Their cry indicates some knowledge. They knew the Lord's name, and had dim notions of His authority, for He is addressed as Jesus and as Master. They knew that He had power to heal, and they hoped that He had mercy, which they might win for themselves by entreaty. There was the germ of trust in the cry forced from them by desperate need. But their conceptions of Him, and their consciousness of their own necessities, did not rise above the purely physical region, and He was nothing to them but a healer.

Still, low and rude as their notions were, they did present a point of contact for Christ's mercy, which is ever ready to flow into every heart that is lowly, as water will into all low levels. Jesus seems to have gone near to the lepers, for it was when He saw, not when He heard, them that He spoke. It did not become Him to cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street, nor would He cure as from afar, but He approaches those whom He heals, that they may see His face, and learn by it His compassion and love. His command recognised and honoured the law, but its main purpose, no doubt, was to test, and thereby to strengthen, the leper's trust. To set out to the priest while they felt themselves full of leprosy would seem absurd, unless they believed that Jesus could and would heal them. He gives no promise to heal, but asks for reliance on an implied promise. He has not a syllable of sympathy; His tender compassion is carefully covered up. He shuts down, as it were, the lantern-slide, and not a ray gets through. But the light was behind the screen all the while. We, too, have sometimes to act on the assumption that Jesus has granted our desires, even while we are not conscious that it is so. We, too, have sometimes to set out, as it were, for the priests, while we still feel the leprosy.

**II. We note the healing granted to obedient faith.**

The whole ten set off at once. They had got all they wanted from the Lord, and had no more thought about Him. So they turned their backs on Him. How strange it must have been to feel, as they went along, the gradual creeping of soundness into their bones! How much more confidently they must have stepped out, as the glow of returning health asserted itself more and more! The cure is a transcendent, though veiled, manifestation of Christ's power; for it is wrought at a distance, without even a word, and with no vehicle. It is simply the silent forth-putting of His power. He spake, and it was doneis much, for only a word which is divine can affect matter. But He willed, and it was done, is even more.

**III. We note the solitary instance of thankfulness.**

The nine might have said, We are doing what the Healer bade us do; to go back to Him would be disobedience. But a grateful heart knows that to express its gratitude is the highest duty, and is necessary for its own relief. How like us all it is to hurry away clutching our blessings, and never cast back a thought to the giver! This leper's voice had returned to Him, and his loudacknowledgments were very different from the strained croak of his petition for healing. He knew that he had two to thank--God and Jesus; he did not know that these two were one. His healing has brought him much nearer Jesus than before, and now he can fall at His feet. Thankfulness knits us to Jesus with a blessed bond. Nothing is so sweet to a loving heart as to pour itself out in thanks to Him.

And he was a Samaritan. That may be Luke's main reason for telling the story, for it corresponds to the universalistic tendency of his Gospel. But may we not learn the lesson that the common human virtues are often found abundantly in nations and individuals against whom we are apt to be deeply prejudiced? And may we not learn another lesson--that heretics and heathen may often teach orthodox believers lessons, not only of courtesy and gratitude, but of higher things? A heathen is not seldom more sensitive to the beauty of Christ, and more touched by the story of His sacrifice, than we who have heard of Him all our days.

**IV. We note Christ's sad wonder at man's ingratitude and joyful recognition of this stranger's thankfulness.**

A tone of surprise as well as of sadness can be detected in the pathetic double questions. Were not the ten--all of them, the ten who stood there but a minute since--cleansed? but where are the nine?Gone off with their gift, and with no spark of thankfulness in their selfish hearts. Were there none found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger?The numbers of the thankless far surpass those of the thankful. The fewness of the latter surprises and saddens Jesus still. Even a dog knows and will lick the hand that feeds it, but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider. We increase the sweetness of our gifts by thankfulness for them. We taste them twice when we ruminate on them in gratitude. They live after their death when we bless God and thank Jesus for them all. We impoverish ourselves still more than we dishonour Him by the ingratitude which is so crying a fault. One sorrow hides many joys. A single crumpled rose-leaf made the fairy princess's bed uncomfortable. Some of us can see no blue in our sky if one small cloud is there. Both in regard to earthly and spiritual blessings we are all sinners by unthankfulness, and we all lose much thereby.

Jesus rejoiced over this stranger, and gave him a greater gift at last than he had received when the leprosy was cleared from his flesh. Christ's raising of him up, and sending him on his way to resume his interrupted journey to the priest, was but a prelude to Thy faith hath made thee whole, or, as the Revised Version margin reads, saved thee. Surely we may take that word in its deepest meaning, and believe that a more fatal leprosy melted out of this man's spirit, and that the faith which had begun in a confidence that Jesus could heal, and had been increased by obedience to the command which tried it, and had become more awed and enlightened by experience of bodily healing, and been deepened by finding a tongue to express itself in thankfulness, rose at last to such apprehension of Jesus, and such clinging to Him in grateful love, as availed to save this strangerwith a salvation that healed his spirit, and was perfected when the once leprous body was left behind, to crumble into dust.