

God's Blunderbuss

Luke 17:11-19

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."

You know the story: ten men with leprosy ask Jesus to heal them. He does. One returns to say "Thank you." Jesus concludes the incident with a statement directed to the thankful one: "Your faith has made you well."

Our attention is often directed to the other nine. We usually assume they were unthankful. But I can be at least as argumentative as you are. Luke tells us that the thankful leper SAW that he was healed. Perhaps the other lepers were BLIND and could not see that they were healed.

Or maybe they were typical GUYS who had a terrible sense of direction, and could not find their way back to where Jesus was waiting, and being guys, they weren't about to ask ANYONE for directions.

Or perhaps they were lousy speakers, and just couldn't find the words to express the words or deep gratitude that was within their hearts.

Perhaps they were understandably hesitant to even approach a person had had such miraculous healing power. At any rate, for whatever reason, nine, newly-healed men with Hanson's disease did not find Jesus and did not thank him. They did not take the time or the risk, to thank the one who used his power as God to heal them in their miserable condition.

But one did. And one thankful leper was told by Jesus WHY he was healed. He got the answer to the question with the big W – the question we and others are always asking. Why? His faith made him well. Nothing he did. Nothing he said. Not because they or their parents had tried so hard to be nice people. He had faith in Jesus, and because of his faith, he was healed. But not only him. His faith just may have been the reason why the other nine were also healed in the process.

If it's true that God healed ten men when he was aiming for just one, then it seems that God must have rather poor aim. Or perhaps God was using a blunderbuss. The dictionary defines "blunderbuss" as a "short musket of wide bore and flaring muzzle used to scatter shot at close range." Nine others were hit by the pleasant, painless buckshot from our Lord's overloaded blunderbuss – intended for just one, who was a man of faith.

I don't think God has poor aim, or that God was wasting his kindness or his miraculous healing. It is his hope that the other nine would also think about their healing, this undeserved kindness, and also come to faith – that they would realize that they were made whole by the kind action of a gracious God, who wants to be in a relationship with them.

I wonder how many times that same thing has happened to us? How often have we experienced God's kindness, when it was actually aimed at someone else? Someone else, nearby, went to God in prayer, trusting and believing that their prayer would be heard and answered, and that God would respond powerfully and personally. God was unloading his blunderbuss of some gift, perhaps family peace or harmony, perhaps nourishment, perhaps good weather, you name it – and we just happened to be close enough to get in the way -- in the line of fire! It didn't hurt – it felt good!

Our personal experience, and the clear message from God's Word is that God's mercy and grace are as broad and deep as his wrath and anger are focused and concentrated. His wrath and his anger are directed like a lightning bolt or a laser beam precisely at the head of each sinful person. God hates sin, and he threatens to punish people who are unrepentant. And we would feel his powerful anger

in the worst way had not Jesus Christ, God's only Son, volunteered to be a lightning rod – our lightning rod, absorbing the focused wrath of a holy God into his own body. God's plan called for a different target, and directed his entire wrath and punishment for each and every sin at the cross of Calvary. And Calvary was not a pretty sight. God's aim was flawless. Our God often chooses to use the blunderbuss of kindness when he aims at people like us or around us. He used the powerful laser-guided weapon when he aimed at his own son.

There are always some around who contend that God is not kind – that somehow, the buckshot of his kindness has missed them completely. Look at Luke 17. The men begged Jesus to show them kindness and mercy. But in their miserable condition, I doubt that any of them felt they deserved it. They certainly didn't blame Jesus for their contagious disease and their forcible segregation from others. In our generation, we are surrounded by people who are convinced that God owes them – that God must show them kindness, give them health, shower them with wealth, provide consistent happiness – whatever! Just because they are breathing, they figure that God owes them. In his infinite wisdom, God does not provide for all his creatures equally, but he has given human beings the capacity to care for others, and to share what they have with others who have serious needs they cannot meet on their own.

God used that gracious blunderbuss to solve the problem of the lepers, and he repeatedly shows his grace and mercy by his willingness to save ALL people from their sins by the death of his son.

Our God urges us to go to him with our petitions and our prayers. He promises to hear them. He promises to answer them. And as we pray according to God's will, he may very well provide the solutions other people are seeking as he answers our prayers and addresses our problems. Our God has often been cursed for what some people consider to be stinginess, or withholding his mercy and kindness. He ought to be credited and praised for his generosity. If God's Word has anything at all to tell us, it is that God has always done MORE he had to do, rather than less. He could have left all ten men in their misery. He might have healed just

one, or maybe six. According to his love and mercy, he healed all ten.

Did you notice that Jesus did not make himself scarce after giving his instructions to the men who had been healed? He waited for their return, so that he could put the miracle into perspective. He wanted them to see that he was about more than healing their medical problem. Jesus used the return of the one thankful leper to explain WHY the man had received the benefit of the power of the Son of God. "Your faith made you well." His faith was grounded in the right person. He was not cured because he had faith in getting well. He was cured because his faith had the right object. He was cured because he believed that Jesus Christ was the solution – the solution to his temporary problem of Hansen's Disease, and his much bigger problem of sin and eternal separation from God.

We generally don't like to be prompted or bullied into saying Thank You. As we have grown up, haven't we all had to be badgered at one time or another by someone else to write, call, or say Thank You because somebody had been nice to us – because someone had given us something. OK, perhaps we WERE going to say it, or perhaps we didn't say it soon enough or loud enough.

On Thanksgiving we don't want the government to nag us to say Thank You. We do it, without nagging, and we do it much more often than one day per year. Christians, more than any other people on the planet, freely and joyfully give thanks to a kind and generous God, who gives us spiritual blessings beyond our wildest expectation, and earthly blessings that take our breath away.

So we say, "We give you thanks, O God."

Thank you for using your blunderbuss to shower us with your grace. Thank you for the harvest and all the food we enjoy and share, and for all the things that meet our needs and make us smile.

Thank you for the people you have placed into our lives. Each one is a blessing.

Thank you for the new life we have in Jesus Christ,
and for the opportunities we have to witness to him
as Savior and Lord.

Thank you, God, for forgiving our sins, and
removing that barrier that would have kept us from
you.

Thank you, God, for eternal life, won for us by
Jesus Christ, miracle worker, Lord, and Savior.

Thank you, God. Thank you.

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