

New Skin for this Earth or a New Body for Heaven?

Luke 17:15-19 (KJV): And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

I. The Dreaming of the Damned

Before we meet them at the roadside, we must imagine them in the twilight of their former lives. Picture them—not as pitiful objects of charity, but as men with memories, ambitions, and sacred regrets. They did not always smell of decay. Once, they had names that mothers whispered with pride. Once, they had trades, callouses from honest labor, and the rough affection of friends who clapped them on the back. **Let us imagine their conversations in the leper colony, after the sun went down and the fires burned low. They would stare at the stars through the gaps in their miserable shelters, and they would speak the language of "If only."** "If only I could be healed," one would say, "I would go back to my carpentry shop. I would finish the table I was carving for my daughter's dowry. I would smell the cedar again and feel the weight of the plane in my hand."

"If only," another would whisper, "I would return to my wife. I would hold her without her flinching. I would sleep in the warmth of my own bed and hear the sound of my children fighting over breakfast. I would work the fields until my back ached, just to feel the dirt between my toes again." "If only," the third would murmur, "I would go to the Temple. I would offer the sacrifice my father taught me to offer. I would stand among the congregation and feel the crushing loneliness lift. I would be a man again, not a ghost haunting the periphery of the village." Their prayer was the prayer of the desperate—"Lord, give me back what I lost. Restore my station. Return me to my routine. Let me go home." They wanted the reconstruction of their old lives. They wanted the disease reversed, the calendar rewound, the social exile ended. In their minds, salvation meant rehabilitation into the old order.

But when the miracle came, a strange and tragic division occurred. Nine of them got exactly what they asked for—a ticket back to the familiar. And one of them got something infinitely greater: a soul that would never be the same.

II. The Cleansing and the Pivot

We read in Luke 17:14 that as they went, they were cleansed. The Greek word is *katharizo*—a ritual, physical purification. They were made ceremonially and dermatologically clean. They were fit to re-enter society. It is a glorious miracle, and we must not minimize it. Leprosy in the ancient world was a living death. Your nerves died, your extremities rotted, your voice grew hoarse from the damage to your larynx, and you were forced to tear your clothes and cry, "Unclean, unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45). To be *katharizo* is to be raised from the tomb of the skin. Yet, let us examine the command of Jesus: He told them to go "shew yourselves unto the priests" (v. 14). He did not immediately pronounce them saved. He sent them to the Levitical authority, the system of the Law. The priest was the one who verified the cleansing, issued the certificate, and declared, "You are fit to go home." The command required obedience. They all obeyed. They all set out on the road to the priests.

But at the moment of transition—the precise instant the physical corruption vanished—the Samaritan veered off the prescribed path. The Law said, "Go to the priest." But the Spirit said, "Return to the Priest." He made a radical, illogical pivot. He did not run to the Temple to be validated by the religious system. He ran back to the dusty roadside where God manifested in the flesh was still standing. This is the first revelation: The nine were obedient to the letter of the command, but the one was obedient to the spirit of the encounter. The nine were busy following the instructions; the one was busy following the Instructor. There is a profound difference between religious compliance and relational obsession. The nine were moving toward their old lives; the one was moving toward the Source of his new life.

III. The Nine: The Tragedy of the Restored Routine

Now, we address the profound insight concerning the nine. They were preoccupied with societal acceptance so they could continue with their old ways, but the one was concerned about the real reason Jesus came into the world—not just to heal physical ailments, but souls. Let us sit with the nine for a moment. They had rehearsed their homecoming for years. Their imaginations were consumed with the taste of familiar bread, the embrace of a wife, the sound of a marketplace, the dignity of labor. In their desperation, they had reduced salvation to a reversal of fortune. They wanted to be "normal" again. And there is nothing inherently wicked about wanting to hold your children. But here is the subtle

poison: they were so in love with the gift of healing that they completely bypassed the Giver of the healing.

The nine received their skin back. Their circulation returned. Their fingers flexed. They ran toward the village—fast, excited, shouting with joy. But their joy had a very short horizon. It terminated at the city gates. They were grateful for the commodity of health, but they had no awe for the person who supplied it. They wanted a better life, but they did not want the Lord of Life. **Their prayer was, "God, give me back my world." Jesus came to say, "I am giving you a new world." This is the most subtle idolatry in the Church today. We come to Jesus for a raise, for a marriage restoration, for a clean bill of health, for a way out of debt. We want the benefits of the Kingdom without the King.** We want the leprosy removed so we can go back to doing exactly what we were doing before, only with better skin. The nine were cleansed, but they were not changed. They were physically restored, but spiritually static. They got a divine intervention, but they never had a divine interaction. They shouted "Hallelujah" on the road, but they never fell at His feet. They received the miracle, but they never received the Miracle Worker.

Do you see the terrifying implication? You can be healed by God and still be lost. You can have your marriage mended and still go to hell. You can have your business restored and still miss eternity. The nine are a warning that physical deliverance is not spiritual redemption. The demon can be cast out, and the house can be swept and garnished, but if the Lord does not move in, the final state is worse than the first (Matthew 12:43-45).

IV. The One: The Key of Gratitude and the Deep Salvation

Now we turn to the Samaritan—the one who returned. The text says he "turned back" (v. 15). In the Greek, hypostrepho—he made a complete about-face. He stopped running toward his old life and ran away from it, back to the feet of Jesus. He fell on his face (v. 16), the posture of total surrender, not just the standing posture of polite thanks. He was a Samaritan—a half-breed, a heretic, the least likely to understand Jewish ritual. And yet, he was the only one who understood ontology—the nature of what had just happened to him. Why was returning and saying "thank you" the key to unlocking his salvation? It was not that God needs our praise. God is not insecure. **The thanksgiving was not for God's sake; it was for his sake. The act of returning was the proof that his priorities had shifted. He realized that the healing was not the destination; the Healer was the destination.**

Let us break this down with deep theological nuance:

1. Thanksgiving is the Litmus Test of Worship

When you give thanks, you are confessing that you are not the origin of your good fortune. The nine took the healing and owned it. It became their health. **The one looked at his new skin and realized it did not belong to him; it was a loan from the King.** Thanksgiving is the act of returning ownership to the Creator. It is saying, "My life is Yours." Without thanksgiving, the miracle is just a biological anomaly. With thanksgiving, the miracle becomes a sacrament.

2. The "Return" Indicates a Change of Heart

The nine were headed to the priests. The priests represented the Law. The Law can declare you clean, but it cannot make you righteous. The one went back to Jesus, who is the telos (end) of the Law for righteousness (Romans 10:4). By returning, he was effectively saying, "I don't just need the priest's certificate; I need the Priest's approval. I don't just need to be allowed back into the synagogue; I need to be allowed into Your presence." He valued the relationship more than the regulation.

3. The Greek Word "Sozo" (Whole)

Jesus says in verse 19, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." The KJV uses "whole," but the Greek is sozo—the same word used for salvation, deliverance, and eternal life. The nine received katharizo (cleansing), but the one received sozo (salvation). The nine got their epidermis back; the one got his soul back. His faith was not just in the power to heal; his faith was in the person who heals. He didn't just believe Jesus could do something; he believed Jesus was someone.

V. The Biblical Theology of "Returning" and Thanksgiving

The concept of "returning" is the heartbeat of the entire Biblical narrative. It is not merely good manners; it is the mechanism of restoration. Consider Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5). He was a leper, a mighty man of valor, but a leper. He went to Elisha, dipped in the Jordan seven times, and his flesh was restored like that of a little child. He was healed. But what did Naaman do? He returned to the man of God. He stood before Elisha and said, "Behold, now I

know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). He did not just go home to Syria to enjoy his new skin. He returned to confess the God of Israel. He even asked for two mule-loads of Israel's earth to take back with him, so he could worship Yahweh on foreign soil. Naaman returned, and the text implies his salvation was sealed. He received a new skin, but he also received a new god.

Contrast this with the ten lepers. Naaman, the Gentile, returned. The one leper, a Samaritan (a half-Gentile), returned. **It is always the outsider, the one who has no "right" to the covenant, who understands grace better than the insiders. The nine were likely Jewish. They knew the Law. They knew the Temple. They knew the protocol. And their religious privilege blinded them to the revolutionary presence of God standing in their midst.** Look at King David in Psalm 103:1-2: "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." David was not just praising God for the benefits; he was praising God for the benefits. The act of remembrance (forgetting not) is the act of returning mentally to the source. David knew that forgetting the source leads to spiritual atrophy.

Consider the Israelites in the wilderness. They were delivered from Egypt (saved from slavery), but they perished in the desert because they forgot the works of God and did not return thanks (Psalm 106:13; 106:21). They were physically freed but spiritually lost. They received the katharizo of the Red Sea, but they never entered the sozo of the Promised Land because of unbelief and ingratitude. Ingratitude is not a small sin; it is the root of apostasy. When you stop returning to the source, you start running toward the fleshpots of Egypt.

VI. The Final Implication: Where Are You Running?

The question that haunts the text is the question that haunts the Church: "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" (v. 17). **Jesus is not asking for information. He is lamenting. He is showing us the tragedy of the superficial blessing.** The nine are not necessarily "evil" men. They are ordinary. **They are most of us. We ask for healing, we ask for provision, we ask for a door to open—and when it opens, we bolt through it and never look back. We treat God like a vending machine. We press the button, get the product, and walk away to enjoy the snack, forgetting the machine exists.**

But the one—the Samaritan—saw the obvious truth. If the Giver can give you skin, the Giver can give you eternity. If He has power over the flesh, He has power over the spirit. The one recognized that the gift was merely a signpost pointing to the Giver. He didn't want the road back to the village; he wanted the road back to Jesus. **Where are you running today? Have you received a miracle? Have you received a breakthrough? Have you received an answer to prayer that left you breathless? Did you return? Did you fall at His feet? Or did you take your new job, your new health, your restored relationship, and merely incorporate it into your old, selfish existence?**

The command of Jesus is this: "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." Notice, He doesn't command him to go to the priest. The priest is unnecessary now. The sinner has been justified by faith. He is free to go his way—but now, "his way" is the Way of the Cross. He has been sozo—saved, healed, delivered, made whole in every dimension of his being. The nine got a new start; the one got a new nature. Let us not be among the nine. When He touches you, do not run to the comfortable. Run back to the uncomfortable truth—that your life is not your own. Fall at His feet. Glorify Him with a loud voice. For it is in the return that we find our soul. Amen.