

The Gospel According to
Luke

“Stop, Drop & Extol”
Chapter 17:11-19

Introduction

Often times, in Bible studies, we mention the various languages of the Bible: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It surprises us to learn that most scholars believe Jesus spoke Aramaic, the language the Jews had learned and brought back from their captivity in Babylon. The Gospel of Mark quotes Jesus in Aramaic several times; the best known of these may be his words on the cross, **Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?** or *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

In more recent times, an expanding number of scholars has rejected Aramaic as the language Jesus spoke. They are convinced that the language Jesus used was Hebrew, *not* Aramaic.

Whether Jesus spoke Aramaic or Hebrew, His words were influenced by another ‘language’ – what we might call *the language of love*. His use of words, and choice of phrases, are often romantic in the sense that they speak to the heart of a person about His love for them.

The story of the ten lepers is a case in point - an illustration of Jesus’ use of romance. He clearly and distinctly, in either Aramaic or Hebrew, told ten lepers, **Go, show yourselves to the priests**. Nine of them complied; one of them started to comply, then stopped, returned to Jesus, and fell down at His feet. Jesus clearly and distinctly, in either Aramaic or Hebrew, said to him, **Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?**

Hey, Jesus – *the nine are doing what you told them to do!* Or were they?

You see, even though Jesus told them to **Go**, it’s clear He wanted them to **stop** and return to Him.

It's confusing, unless you factor in a romantic element. This is a kind of language only lovers understand. Go, but don't go; start off, but stop and return.

God is love. Jesus loves you. He expresses His love using romance. We can be so analytical, so intellectual, that we miss the subtlety of the romance.

One leper understood. I want to look at the story of the ten lepers as a romance. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 When Jesus Says "Go," You Should Start Walking, and #2 When Jesus Says "Go," You Should Stop And Worship.

#1 When Jesus Says "Go,"
You Should Start Walking
(v11-14)

Leprosy began with a small patch on a person's skin. The spot would become glossy, then scaly, and then the skin would become numb. The person would begin to lose feeling and sensitivity in the affected areas. You had to become very careful in shaving yourself or in bruising yourself because you would not feel any cut or hurt. Eventually the infected area would become an ulcerous sore. There was no healing. The sore would begin to emit blood and water and ooze all the time. The skin of the person would begin to bunch up, especially around the eyes and the ears and the nose, so that he would begin to look like a lion. The skin would feel like an elephant's. It would begin to blister. Soon the leprosy would spread to the fingers and the feet until parts would fall off - the ears, the nose, the fingers, the feet. It was a hideous, terrible disease!!

But there was more to it. It was not just what you could see. Inwardly the disease was at work as well. The voice of the leper was affected. It became hoarse and raspy. And the odor of a leper would become a great stench. So great was the stench, we are told, that a taste would be left in the mouth of anyone who would smell the leper.

A leper was like a living dead man. Death and decay was at work. Yet the man was alive. In fact we are told that in the Middle Ages

there would be a funeral for a person who would contract leprosy even though the person were yet alive.

The law of God in the Old Testament required that the pitiful men and women who were infected with this plague of leprosy could have no fellowship with others. The leper had to leave his family and live in rudely constructed huts in a colony of other lepers without the daily, common fellowship of the people of God or their own families. And the law said that as they approached anyone, they had to cry out, *Unclean, unclean*, that no unsuspecting person would come near them.

Leprosy was a physical representation of the true spiritual condition of every man. The filthiness and repulsiveness of sin are represented in leprosy. If you could see yourself the way you look to God – you'd see yourself as a pile of rotting flesh!

The leper who trudged down a hot, dusty, road crying out, *Unclean! Unclean!* was a visual reminder to you that you, too, were a *spiritual* leper who needed God's supernatural cleansing.

Jesus encountered ten lepers limping:

Luke 17:11 Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

Luke 17:12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off.

Luke 17:13 And they lifted up *their* voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

Ten desperate and destitute men had heard something about Jesus. They did not possess a complete knowledge of who Jesus was, or what He was doing. They knew only enough to cry out to Him for help.

It's sad that folks sometimes become desperate and destitute before they will cry out to Jesus for help. He wants to help you way before you cry out. Turn to Jesus before your life falls apart!

Luke 17:14 So when He saw *them*, He said to them, "**Go, show yourselves to the priests.**" And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

There was no known cure for leprosy. But there was a ritual you had to undergo, just in case you were ever healed from leprosy. You can read all about leprosy and the ritual of cleansing in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus, in chapters thirteen and fourteen. The ritual for cleansing didn't heal you; it was a process of observation, then sacrifice, by which a priest declared you were healed.

Ten lepers asked for **mercy**. In their case, **mercy** meant healing. Jesus told them to **Go**, as if they had already been healed and now needed to **show themselves to the priests** to verify the cleansing and return to everyday life. Jesus had not touched them, or prayed for them; He had done nothing that you could see or hear, except to say, **Go**. But, **as they went, they were cleansed**.

Their **go-ing** represents obedience to the Word of God. They simply obeyed the Word, without explanation or reasoning:

1. They had no explanation from Jesus of what He was doing, or why they should do what He commanded. We can fail to obey God's Word because we want an explanation of where obedience will lead; or of what obedience will require; or something similar.
2. They did not reason about the command to **Go**. They didn't analyze it; or criticize it; or minimize it.

They did what Jesus commanded, and **as they went**, they experienced the benefits of obedience. In their case, the benefits were immediate; they were immediately healed of their leprosy.

When a person receives Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin, they are immediately cleansed from spiritual leprosy. They stand before God whole and cleansed.

As you walk with the Lord, and seek to obey Him, you find certain issues can take more time. If you have destroyed relationships, like your marriage, they may not immediately be healed. In fact, coming to Jesus might be the final blow to your marriage; your unbelieving spouse might abandon you!

No matter the immediate results, you are to obey the Lord, and **Go** forward in your walk with Him. You will experience the benefits of obedience; if not immediately, then ultimately.

This is the point where the story turns. Jesus told them to **Go**, and they **went**. But one stops; he returns to Jesus. Before you say, *Of course he did; it's what Jesus wanted*, think about it. Put yourself in the story: You don't know very much about Jesus, but you think He can heal you. He tells you to **Go and to show** yourself **to the priests**. Shouldn't you fully obey Him? Shouldn't you both **go and show** yourself **to the priests**?

What if you didn't fully obey? What if you started to **Go**, but once you realized you were healed, do something else? Would the leprosy return?

These are more significant issues than we might realize. While there may be a logical explanation for the one leper's actions, I think that the best way to understand the whole scene has to do with the language of love and romance. Jesus said **Go**, but He also meant don't go. He also meant stop, return, and worship Me.

#2 When Jesus Says "Go," You Should Stop And Worship (v15-19)

As the one leper broke away, and headed back to Jesus, I think that the other nine probably warned him that he was not fully following the Word. **Go** and *show* was the clear teaching from the lips of Jesus. He took the risk, because something had stirred, not just in his flesh, but in his heart. He recognized and responded to the love of God. This Jesus Who had spoken to him with such tender mercy must be loved in return. Surely no legal requirement could overrule love from a pure heart.

Luke 17:15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God,
Luke 17:16 and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

Why does Luke, the author of this Gospel, mention specifically that it was **with a loud voice** that he **glorified God**? Leprosy had affected this man's voice. It had been a long time since he could raise his voice. **Of course he wanted to shout!**

You are told for the first time that this man was a **Samaritan**. Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the Jews – the result of Jews intermarrying with their Assyrian captors centuries earlier. Jews despised Samaritans.

It is interesting that all such prejudice was set aside by the nine Jews who were lepers. What difference did it make if someone were Samaritan or Jew when they shared the pain of leprosy?

The point Jesus will make is that a Samaritan had greater understanding of His love than nine Jews who were bound by the Law. It's another example in Jesus' ministry that the Gospel was for everyone, for whosoever would believe in Him.

Luke 17:17 So Jesus answered and said, **"Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"**

Jesus addressed this question to everyone who was listening; and to anyone who ever hears it. Weren't the **nine** doing exactly what Jesus commanded? Was this some kind of a trick question?

Christians sometimes express that they feel as though the Word of God is like a trick question on a test. God says one thing; but does He mean another?

If you will enter the realm of romance, and remember that God is love, and that Jesus loves you; then you'll immediately put aside any thoughts that God wants to trick you, or trip you up. You'll understand that love always overrules the Law; that love is the fulfillment of the Law.

You might even think of it this way: Jesus said, **Go, show yourselves to the priests**. The nine lepers, following the letter of the Law, went to show themselves to the Jewish priests. The one leper may not have known it, but he was also showing himself to the Priest! Jesus was

the fulfillment of the Law; Jesus was and is God's great High Priest – the One all other priests only represented. So this Samaritan was, in fact, fulfilling the command to **Go, and show yourself**, but he was doing it from love.

Love never breaks God's Law; it fills it out, it fulfills it. If you are going to **Go** and walk with Jesus, you must also **stop** and worship Him.

Luke 17:18 *Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"*

Jesus was preparing His disciples for the inevitable result of His ministry: That He would be despised and rejected by Jews who thought that they were keeping the letter of the Law.

It's all too possible for Christians to think that they are keeping the letter of the Law, while violating the spirit of the Law.

We left the Samaritan on the ground. It's time for him to get up and go:

Luke 17:19 *And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."*

All ten had been made well physically. Only one had been made well spiritually.

Nine no longer had leprosy in their flesh; but they still had it spiritually. They were not saved; they were lost.

Sometimes, in their desperation, people cry out to the Lord to help them. In His mercy, He does help them. They go off helped, but not whole. They do not give their lives to Jesus. It's no ultimate good to be physically or emotionally healed if you are not spiritually made whole.

The ritual for being declared clean by a priest lasted seven or eight days, and it involved animal sacrifices. There is no ritual to be performed when you go directly to Jesus! And He is your sacrifice.

The Samaritan went his way, walking with the Lord in a love relationship. It's love, from relationship, that God desires; not legalism, from rituals.

The Samaritan understood the romance of God in saving him. He responded to it and found himself obeying the Word out of love, not law; he found himself fulfilling the law of love – and enjoying a relationship free from ritual religion.