

## **Miracles of Jesus 12-11-11a**

This is Sunday, November the 11th, 2012. Happy Veterans Day. Happy post-Marine Corps birthday.

Had a great celebration yesterday. But we continue our study in the miracles of the Lord Jesus. We're going to be, for this session, in Luke chapter 17, verses 11 through 19.

This is the cleansing of the ten lepers. We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to dedicate our time of study to the Lord and to ask His blessing on it, and then we'll begin. Shall we pray? Father, thank You for this time of fellowship, of encouragement, of refreshment through songs and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to You.

We thank You for the gift of Your Word and the truth that has been preserved for us down through the centuries in a pure and unadulterated form. We have the ministry of Your Spirit to lead us into its heart and into its power, to reveal it to us, to make it clear, to help us not only understand it and perceive it, but also to interpret it and to apply it as we live day by day. We know that the time that You give to us each day and each hour in these days is also a gift and an opportunity, not just to navigate the rocks and shoals of this life, but to apply and to live in the light of these truths.

We pray that as we study this passage this morning, that God the Holy Spirit will superintend, that He will be our teacher, that each of us will come away with fresh motivation and encouragement and strength and a clear idea of how we can best grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and serve You in the time that remains to us in this life as we prepare for service in the next. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Luke chapter 17 verses 11 through 19 describe for us an episode that takes place in a certain village as Jesus is traveling toward Jerusalem. Way back in Luke chapter 13, Luke has also noted that Jesus is on the way and much of the teaching in these chapters is a summary or a collection of the things that Jesus taught on that trip. But the fact that it is on that journey, this is not the Sermon on the Mount, it's not the Sermon on the Plain, it's not delivered from a boat to people on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, it is on the way.

He's traveling through Galilee and through Samaria. So if you note, for example, that Jesus in Luke chapter 13 is going through the cities. In verse 22, He went through the cities and villages teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.

Then one of them said to Him, Lord, are there few who are saved? And He said to them, strive to enter through the narrow gate. That's our context. Way back in chapter 13, that begins this journey teaching or is sort of at the beginning of it.

But look at the question. One said to Him, Lord, are there few who are saved? Saved is translating the Greek word sozo, S-O-Z-O or S-O-D-Z-O. We pronounce it with a little bit of a harder Z. Are there many who are saved? What's He talking about here? Is this salvation from the lake of fire? What would you think? Probably not.

This is deliverance into the kingdom of God. This is what these Jewish people are asking. They know they're all the people of God.

But Jesus has been telling parables of the kingdom. He's just given the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of leaven and about the distinctions between people in the kingdom. The last shall be first.

Way back at the beginning of the chapter, unless you repent, you will all perish. The 18 on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. So this is deliverance from judgment certainly, but not the eternal judgment of the lake of fire.

If you said lake of fire to them, they wouldn't know what you were talking about. There's no Old Testament picture of the lake of fire. We haven't gotten to Luke chapter 16 yet with Abraham and the rich man and Lazarus and the torments and finger in the water to cool my tongue.

None of that. So when you talk to this audience about judgment and about perishing versus life and deliverance, this is in terms of the blessing of God. Are you going to be blessed? And the long life and prosperity in this life is a metaphor for what is coming and a preview of what is coming in the next life.

And in the minds of these Jewish hearers, there is judgment from God which everyone deserves. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

There is none that doeth righteousness, no, not one. There is recognition that we are all sinful. David says, I was conceived in iniquity and born in sin.

So where is the deliverance? Well, there is deliverance in faith and obedience. The righteous shall live by his faith. That's Old Testament, right? So this is what the context is.

We Christianize this and modernize it. We say, well, will many be saved and there's just going to be a few Christians and everybody else is going to hell. It's not what's in view.

They would have no concept of this. Jesus has spoken earlier. Do you suppose that the Galileans were worse sinners than others because they suffered such things? The ones that Pilate had mingled their blood with the sacrifices.

And then he tells the parable of the barren fig tree. He says, this fig tree is not bearing. Let me cut it down.

He says, no, let me cultivate it. Let me water it and dig around it and encourage it and give it what it needs and see if it will bear figs and if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that, you can cut it down.

So is the fig tree, Israel, as a nation, as a people, going to be cut down or are they going to return and bear fruit? Cut down is not eternal destruction. It's loss of their blessed status, loss of their presence of God, the power of God shining the light to the Gentiles and so on. Loss of their mission, loss of their purpose.

Not hell fire. So that's the context when you get to verse 23. Lord, are there few who are delivered? Sozo.

Delivered. It's important to understand that because this word is going to come up in our study this morning of the healing of the ten lepers. If you look at chapter 14, just real quickly, remember the man with dropsy? We covered that the same time we covered the woman that had been afflicted for 18 years.

That swelling, humidity, you get too much fluid in your body. And remember, that's the least documented miracle of Christ that there is because it doesn't even say the man was healed. It's just a conversation.

Where does it say the man with dropsy went away rejoicing or shrunk down to a size 32 regular or whatever? It doesn't say anything like that. You got the whole account there. They're watching him and he says, Which of you, having a donkey or an ox fallen into a pit, would not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day? They could not answer him regarding these things.

What happened to the man? Well, we assume he was healed, but it doesn't say. Anyway, we go forward and you can skim through those next few chapters. Jesus is telling a lot of parables.

The parable of the unjust steward in chapter 16, the law of the prophets and the kingdom, the rich man and Lazarus. Then we get to chapter 17. It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come.

It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck. He would cast into the sea. The disciples in verse 5 say, Lord, increase our faith.

This is one of the best things the disciples ever said in the entire gospel record. Lord, increase our faith. Now, what is faith? We've talked about what is salvation.

What is faith? Faith is the content of what we believe. We are walking in the faith. This

isn't, Lord, increase our ability to believe.

Lord, increase our dedication to the truth. Lord, increase our spirituality. No.

Increase our faith. What are they saying? Improve our knowledge. Improve our understanding.

Increase our grip on the plan and purpose of God by telling us how it works. And look how Jesus answers that request. If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to the mulberry, be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea, and it would obey you.

Now, is that just if you have such strong belief? Have you ever seen the... I've seen a couple of episodes, to my dismay, of American Idol. And this other one, there's some other thing where they have their peace sign and a microphone. What is that? The voice or something.

And all of these shows follow the same thing. It's just like when they used to, everybody wanted to play Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? Then they had several knockoff shows. Now they've got several knockoffs of American Idol.

It's all the same thing. Three judges, and one way or another, they say who gets to sing. And it's always singing.

They don't have tap dancing, you know, the American Idol of tap dancing. They don't have the American Idol of fingerstyle guitar. They don't have the American Idol of painting.

It's always singing. Why? Because singing is all about me. You're focused on me.

You get to look at me, and it's my voice, and I'm going to be the next Madonna or whatever. Here's my point. When they interview these people, and they stretch, you know, you could cover the whole thing in about 12 minutes, but they stretch it to an hour by repeating it and going to commercial, and they tell you what's going to happen right before the commercial.

They play the commercial. They come back and replay the same piece of tape. But they always stick a microphone in these places, and they say, well, Fernando, what are your hopes here? And here's Fernando.

He's a janitor at the high school gym, but he can sing. Well, you know, I really believe, and all of these people believe. You look at the football teams on the weekend.

We believe. You look at the Republican candidate for president, and you're looking at the next first lady. If I just believe strong enough, it will happen.

And if I speak it, it will be so. Power of positive thinking. That is not what Jesus is talking

about.

The disciples say increase our faith, and he says if you have faith as a grain of mustard, what's he talking about? It's not, oh, I just really, really believe. My belief is so strong, I can visualize it. I'm visualizing world peace.

I'm visualizing the Cowboys having a winning season. I'm visualizing. No.

Any unbeliever can delude themselves into believing that something is going to be so, and they're so certain of it. You know, Karl Rove, yeah, Romney's going to sweep all the swing states. He believed it.

He talked himself into it, talked other people into it. He was wrong. He was catastrophically wrong.

But he really, really believed it. This is not the kind of faith. Faith is content.

If you have content, you can say to the tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea, and say, and I would want to do that. Why? Why do you want a mulberry tree, first of all? Hands up, everybody that's had a mulberry tree in their yard. Oh, brother, what a bad tree to have.

The thing, you park under it, it rains mulberries down. Do you all remember when we lived at Field Crescent and had that gargantuan mulberry tree? The mulberries were a curse. I would have enjoyed saying to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea.

Maybe that's what the Lord is talking about. He knows what mulberries are like. It's like a curse tree.

Get rid of this tree. That tree was too big, couldn't cut it down without taking out somebody's house. It's still there.

Be uprooted and be planted, and it would obey you. Now, how is it we say, well, that can't be right. I can't just say, Ford Expedition, be uprooted and planted across town.

I don't move physical objects with my faith. What is he talking about? If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, if you understood the parameters and the purposes and the goals and objectives of God's plan and purpose well enough, if you had a mustard seed worth of understanding of what God is actually up to, you could enter into physical circumstances in prayer and in faith, and extraordinary things would happen. That's what he's saying.

And many of us have seen this in our lives. This is a metaphor. It's not real trees.

It's not a real ocean. This cursed mulberry tree gets uprooted and planted where it

belongs, out in the wicked troubled sea. Let it rain mulberries on Leviathan and Behemoth and all that stuff.

That's where they belong. Put them together. Put them where they belong.

Put the evil where it goes. That's my interpretation. Which of you having a servant plowing or tending sheep will say to him when he has come in from the field, come at once and sit down to eat? This isn't a feel-good faith.

This is a proper order and priority of things. You don't break down the walls of separation between the masters and the servants. There are those who have guns, and there are those who dig.

There are those who are in charge, and there are those who are not. And you respect that difference. This is a part of the faith.

It's a part of the faith. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Wives, submit yourselves voluntarily with grace and beauty to your husbands, not because they're smarter, not because they're better, because God tells us to.

Husbands, love your wives, not because they're all intrinsically lovely, not because you're such a great lover. It's because God tells us to. Elders, labor in the work, not because you get remuneration, not because it's big glory in television shows, because God tells you to.

There is a principle there. Why did the Levites serve in the tabernacle and the other twelve tribes did not? Because God told them to. Were the Levites any better than the other Israelites? No.

Any more qualified to chop up animals? No. Any more holy and righteous? No. Remember Simeon helped Levi carve up the original animals that brought that service on him in the first place, but the Simeonites are not down there at the tabernacle? God makes designations.

He says, look, this is my plan, carry it out. First platoon, you're going to assault straight up the slope. Second platoon, you're going to hook around.

It's not because first platoon or second platoon is any better at hooking or assaulting up a hill. It's the designation. It's part of a larger plan.

This is what He's talking about when He says faith, and this is what He's talking about when He says deliverance. All of this is necessary background and context when we get to verse 11. Now, it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

No accident. Why Samaria? Jesus doesn't have the conflicted attitude toward the

Samaritans that Jews in His generation had. He doesn't view them as outcasts and ne'er-do-well because of their birth, because of their ancestry.

They're in the land. They claim to be the people of God. They worship God.

They've got the whole conflict between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. They claim Abraham. They claim the law of Moses.

And they're a part of the people of God. They're the remnants of the northern kingdom. And David was the king of all Israel, not just Judah.

And the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be king of all Israel, not just Judah. So He doesn't have the assignment of stigma to the Samaritans that has come to be the norm and the tradition and is popular. So, as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off.

This is the lepers' club. The only people lepers could hang around with were other lepers. And societally speaking, this is the way a lot of Christians are.

The only people we can hang around with are other Christians because everybody else is unclean. Get away. They've got something.

So they lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. When He saw them, He said to them, Go, show yourselves to the priest. Did we miss something there? Hi there.

We're ten lepers. Have mercy on us. Jesus says, Go see the priest.

Go let the priest look at you. So what does this do? This creates a situation. I mean, Jesus is done.

Jesus is through. Go show yourself to the priest. And Jesus is moving on.

He's traveling on down the road. So now what do the lepers have to do? They have to make a decision. Jesus has said, Go show yourself to the priest.

What does that mean? Well, A, you have to know your Law of Moses. You have to know Leviticus 14, which says what? If you have had leprosy and you are cleansed, you must go to the priest. And there is a series of rituals that will be performed to reinstate you into full function and enable you to enter into the synagogue or temple precincts and worship and be accepted into the fold as a normal Israelite with all the rights and privileges thereunto pertaining.

But it begins, it doesn't even matter if you say, Hey, my leprosy is gone. Nothing happens until you show yourself to the priest. God has a plan.

God has an order. God has authority that has been set up. And it doesn't matter what your skin looks like.

You're not clean until the priest says you're clean. Right? Jesus is not rubbing out the lines of that authority. Jesus knows that they are healed or they will soon be healed.

And He says, look, you need to get yourself on the road to go see the priest. It means they've got to go to Jerusalem, right? It would be real interesting because He's going to Jerusalem. They're going to Jerusalem.

Maybe they can get some good Bible classes on the way down. Go show yourselves to the priests. And so it was that as they went, what does this tell us? They had to think this through.

If He's telling us to go to the priest, He's basically telling us that the priests are going to be looking at us to see if we're healed. But they've got to make this leap of logic. He doesn't say, all right, let me explain to you now.

I'm healing you, abracadabra, salt and pepper, you're no leper, or whatever. He doesn't use any formula. He doesn't touch them.

He doesn't say go bathe in the creek. He doesn't give them any instructions. He just says, go show yourself to the priest.

He assumes His conclusion. He assumes it has already happened. And they have to assume when they make the decision, because they're not healed yet.

They have to turn and begin the journey to the priest. That's why it tells us, as they went, they were cleansed. As they went, they were cleansed.

And notice it says cleansed and not healed. Because leprosy was seen as an overt physical manifestation of defilement. It was a strong picture of walking death.

Jesus says, go show yourself to the priest. And when they decide to go, then they are cleansed. By the way, this has implications for the Reformed view of faith and the order in which things take place.

Does God save you and then you believe? Or do you believe and then you are saved? Do you respond in faith and obedience? Faith in particular, because faith precedes obedience. The reason you obey is you believe that God is who He says He is, that He has the authority to issue the command, and that you should, in fact, obey. And so you believe, and then you act.

And that's what they do. They believe that Jesus has the power to cleanse them. They believe that if they turn and start toward Jerusalem, something good will happen, and sure enough, it does.

But they had to respond. Jesus gives the command, and it's up to them. Five of the lepers could have said, are you kidding me? That is a long journey.

I'm a leper. I'm going to be, I don't, what's the point of going to the priest? They won't even let me in the door. But they believe, and they turn, and they start to go.

And as they go, they are cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned. Notice, saw that he was healed.

As they went, they were cleansed. He saw that he was healed. Turned, and with a loud voice, glorified God.

Recognized exactly what had happened. He is cleansed. He is healed.

And God did it. And he's glorifying God. And he fell down on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? This guy had to make a trip back. The nine are not even in sight.

If you've seen the topography, by the way, in the inner face between Galilee and Samaria, this is apparently, you know, in that area. It's not like they can just turn a corner and be out of sight. It's rolling hills.

They could have been. They've gone some distance. And this guy has returned some distance to see the Lord Jesus.

Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner? That tells you that he is not in Samaria. He's still in Galilee, but near the edge. This guy is a Samaritan who has come up to be with the Galileans.

And he's got two strikes against him. He's a leper and he's a Samaritan. He's the one that returns.

He said to him, Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well. Cross out made you well.

The word there is sozo. Your faith has saved you. Sozo, there's no word there for well.

It's saved you. The very same thing we saw back in chapter 13. So what does it mean? Your faith has delivered you.

Delivered you from what? Well, from everything. He's no longer unclean. He is no longer leprous.

And he is delivered out of everything. He's delivered from circumstances. He is delivered

from ostracism.

He's delivered from criticism. He is delivered from the putting down and the denigration that is a part of formerly being a leper and still being a Samaritan. Jesus had great love for the Samaritans.

The parable of the good Samaritan. This man, the woman at the well, he must needs go through Samaria. The woman at the well and all those people in the village are Samaritans.

Jesus loved them just as much as He did the rest of Israel. Well, what can we say about this? We've seen the account. The key, as I said earlier, goes back to the beginning of this section back in chapter 13 and extends most immediately back to verse 5. Increase our faith.

Increase our faith. The context for faith is service. It is required, as Paul says, in a steward that a man be found faithful.

Faith and obedience are not a means of salvation. They don't earn God's gratitude or God's blessing. They are an expression of our faith and our gratitude.

And that's why we had this earlier illustration of the servants coming in from the field. It's not the master who should be grateful to his servants. Their service is expected because they are servants.

It is the servants who should be grateful to the master for the privilege of serving him. They are dependent on him. Although they possess no special merit, he gives them purpose, verse 7. They have purpose and they have meaning and they have value in the context of the master's property, the master's agenda.

That's what makes the servants valuable, and they recognize that. And they say, even when we seem to be going above and beyond, we have done no more than is expected. That's the context, and context is critical.

It's not just, well, I'm all through with that, so now let me throw in a healing. This healing flows directly out of those words. Increase our faith.

And he says, look, put yourself in a context, and in which direction does gratitude flow? Is God grateful that he's got some people willing to believe in him? Or are we grateful that God is willing to deliver us and willing to enter us into his plan? This is the function of humility, to recognize our place in God's plan. And we start getting this sense of entitlement that is so ubiquitous in our day. Well, why is God, why am I having to go through this? Why have I got these issues? Why are things so difficult? Why is it the way it is? Why am I not having more success? Why am I not having the things that I want? And we start sort of placing demands on God as though he's kind of failing to support our

agenda as he should.

You know, I've got an idea of how things ought to be, and it's not falling out that way. What's up, God? Well, Jesus precedes this, and Luke, in his account, precedes this healing with that correcting view. Look, we're servants.

And we may be coming in, and don't expect the master to say, hey, come sit at my table and share my food. He says, look, make my meal, and after you've made mine, then you can eat. And the servants do that, and they say, look, that's great.

We've done no more than what is required. Likewise, you, when you have done all those things, verse 10, which are commanded, say, we are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.

Now, what does it mean unprofitable? It doesn't mean we're worthless. When you do what you're supposed to do, you haven't created a benefit. You've fulfilled your role.

You're not a deficit. You haven't created a deficit, but you've not created a profit either. You've done exactly what you're supposed to do.

When you show up for formation in the military, they don't pin a medal on you and say, well, here's the 14th award of the show up for formation medal. You've done what you were supposed to do. That's not a profit.

Showing up for formation doesn't advance the cause of the Marines or the Navy or the Air Force or the Coast Guard or the National Guard or the Army. We love Veterans Day. Today is Veterans Day.

But there are certain things that we do, and that doesn't, that's just a part of being in the service. You have not created a profit. Profit is when you go above and beyond, when you do something extra, when you make the master some money.

Fixing his dinner doesn't make him any money. You didn't go above and beyond and, wow, I've got 110% of my meal instead of 100%. No, you did what you were supposed to do, so don't get the big head.

Jesus says, you, when you have done all the things which you are commanded, say, we are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do. And this has larger implications looking back to the Old Testament function of believers, where about the best you could do in fulfilling the law of Moses was not create a deficit.

If you didn't break a command, if you fulfilled the law, you're still an unprofitable servant. You've not done anything beyond what you're supposed to do. Where does the profit come in? Where does the multiplication come in? Remember the parable of the talents? Gave you five, you made five more.

Gave you three, you made three more. Gave you one, and you stuck it in your pocket, didn't do anything with it. You're unprofitable, and you're cast out, right? Well, we're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see that this is not just, wow, wasn't that Samaritan a really nice guy to come back and thank Jesus. There is a message here that begins at the beginning of the chapter. It actually begins back in chapter 13 and extends through this part of Luke.

But the point of this miracle is to emphasize what Jesus has just communicated, increase our faith. Do we want our faith increased? By the way, increase, what's another word for increase? What's another word for increase? If I make an investment and it increases, what do I pull off? Profit. Make our faith profitable.

That's what He's talking about. Give us information so that we can be more profitable. And Jesus says, well, if you've got the right content, if you understand the plan that you're a part of, if you're a wise servant, you'll be able to do big, extraordinary things.

But you have to remember that it begins with doing those things that are expected and required by the Master. We are unprofitable servants. We've done what was our duty to do.

The nine lepers are doing what they are told to do, right? They're not profitable. Where does the prophet come in when this one returns? What is it that he specifically does? And what is it that Jesus specifically points out that the nine did not do? Were there not any found who did what? Returned to give glory to God. The glory of God is the prophet.

The glory of God is the above and beyond. We can be faithful, we can be diligent, and we've done no more than what we were expected to do. But when the glory of God is reflected, when the glory of God is manifested, remember Paul in 2 Thessalonians, what did he say? Pray that the word of God will go forth and be glorified, that the glory of God will be manifest and reflected, that it will be appreciated, that it will be seen and understood.

This is the purpose for our lives, that God is glorified. Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Neither, but what? That the glory of God might be revealed. We look at situations and say, I don't understand why God is doing what he's doing.

Very often the key and the solution and the reason is found in the glory of God. Why was this man born blind? Glory of God. Were there not ten healed? Is there not anybody else that will return to give God the glory? Well, this is an interesting perspective, it's an interesting observation, and we'll do a little bit more with it when we come back from the break.