

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom
(*Studies in the Gospel of Luke*)

Serving, the Jesus Way

(Luke 17:11-19)

Study #12

Introduction: [How to] spread the word...

I watched a movie this week. It was a Christian movie, and it brought to the surface something that I want to see live above the surface in my life more than it often does.

This "something" has been above the surface for a good while now, and I'm thankful to God for that. At least to some extent, that is because of the time you and I have been spending looking at the life of Jesus over the past three months.

It's been refreshing for me to have seen the ways of Jesus as Luke describes it in his Gospel. This movie brought that all to mind.

The movie opened with a scene of some good friends sitting in a backyard of one of their homes. They had just finished eating and were all talking. These friends were all Christians.

The talk quickly turned to the desire they all had to see their friends who didn't know Jesus come to know Him. If you know Jesus, you can relate to that desire.

At some point, maybe a long time ago or maybe recently, you heard Jesus' promise of life. Abundant and eternal life.

You heard Him say, [*John 14:6*] "***I am the Way and the Truth and the Life***" - and you believed Him.

You took Him at His word, received eternal life, and were made a new creation in Christ.

Planted in your soul on that day was a desire to see others receive the same gift that you received.

You want to see your family and friends and even those you don't know come to know the Jesus you have come to know.

That's my desire and it's yours and it is a good desire. The friends in this movie I watched had this same desire.

And there in the backyard, they got reflective. They all turned thoughtful. They were considering, together, "*What could we do to spread the message of Jesus?*"

You could just see the wheels turning, as the wheels sometimes turn in our minds, reflecting on the same question.

Over the last twenty centuries, believers in Jesus have thought and prayed and looked for the best ways to spread the message. There have been lots of experiments tried to bring people to faith.

This morning, we are wrapping up our time of thinking about the stunning priorities of Jesus' kingdom and we'll see what we can learn from Him about how we might best spread the word.

Learning about Jesus...

To learn about Jesus, we naturally turn to the four Gospels of the New Testament.

It is true that we can find historical records about Jesus outside of the New Testament. But the main source materials for what we know about Jesus are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.¹

All four were written by men whose lives had been transformed by the crucified and resurrected Jesus. So, of course, they wanted us all to know about Jesus.

But each of them had a slightly different aspect of Jesus's life and ministry they wanted to emphasize. So, they each included certain details about Him to get across the point they were making about Him.

So, here at the front end, let's think about the four Gospels for a minute.

Many people - including me - believe that the last of the four Gospels to be written was John.² And John was the only one of the four to give us a purpose statement.

Four Purposeful Gospels

John - Explicitly Evangelistic

[John 20:30] So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.

¹ The Gospel writers all used source material from which they chose for the book they were writing. John tells us that he selected from a much larger pool of information the material that would serve his purpose. *[John 21:24] This is the disciple who is testifying about these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. [25] But there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written in detail, I expect that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.* Luke also lets us know that, after diligent investigation, he has recorded events told to him by eyewitnesses *“in an orderly sequence”* to his friend, Theophilus so that he might know *“the exact truth”* about what he had been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

² All four were written within several decades of the death of Jesus.

The Apostle John wrote his book to tell anyone who reads it how to have eternal life.

Over and over again, John records Jesus telling us that God gives eternal life to the one who believes in Him. His book is great for anyone who reads it, but it is explicitly evangelistic.³

If, back in January, I had wanted us to get exposure to a mainly evangelistic message, I would have turned to John.

Then, there is Matthew and Mark and Luke. These three (often referred to as the *synoptic* Gospels) are all more like each other than any of them are like John.⁴

And, of these three, Matthew and Mark are most alike. I happen to believe - as many others also do - that Matthew wrote his Gospel first.⁵

Matthew - All Things Jewish

A careful study of Matthew's Gospel reveals that he wrote to a mostly Jewish audience. And this Jewish focus was exactly what was needed in the earliest days of the church when the followers of Jesus were primarily Jewish.

Matthew emphasized Jesus' Jewishness throughout. (See the genealogy in chapter 1) Matthew has more Old Testament quotes and allusions in his book than there are in the other three. Matthew writes as a Jew to Jews from an *“all things Jewish”* tilt.

Matthew's Gospel is a fantastic record of Jesus' life and ministry and it is great for Jews and non-Jews alike.

³ John's gospel is strikingly different from the other three gospels. Ninety-two percent of the material in John is not repeated in Matthew, Mark, or Luke.

⁴ From the Greek (roughly) “from the same view.”

⁵ Many believe that Mark was the first Gospel written. For a variety of reasons, I disagree.

But a focus on the royal Jewishness of Jesus and His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies wasn't exactly what I was wanting to emphasize. So, we didn't turn to Matthew.

Then, there is Mark.

Mark - Breathless! Action! Honest!

Mark and Matthew share a lot of the same material, but there is a difference to Mark's book.

Mark wrote later than Matthew and probably for a non-Jewish, likely Roman, audience. Mark's Gospel doesn't read as "Jewish" as Matthew's does.⁶

And Mark wrote breathlessly. In Mark, there is action. The word "*immediately*" occurs thirty-nine times. The mood is GO! And there is a special focus in Mark on Jesus as a suffering Servant.

Mark is also distinctive for his "*warts and all*" descriptions of the disciples - especially of Peter.⁷

Spending time in Mark's Gospel, with all his distinctive emphases, is always a rewarding thing to do. But back in January, as I was reflecting on our situation and need, I was more drawn to spend time in Luke.

Luke - Exhaustively Universal in Scope and Appeal

I have come to love Luke's Gospel more and more as the years have passed. I hope you have come to love it, too, as these last couple of months have passed.

⁶ His book is identified as a Gospel (Mark 1:1) with the likelihood that he was taking a swipe at imperial Rome, which referred to news about Caesar as "gospel."

⁷ Mark was not an eyewitness. Early church tradition (from Papias, who lived 60-130AD) tells us that Mark got most of his content from the Apostle Peter. Given the amount of material that Marks includes that reflects poorly on Peter, with numerous failures and faults, this gives us a wonderful picture of Peter's humility..

Luke's focus isn't explicitly Jewish and isn't exclusively Gentile. It is exhaustively universal in scope and appeal.⁸

There is constant reference to Jesus bringing blessing to ALL people, that He is here for the Jews AND for the non-Jews, and that ALL people are invited to the great banquet God is hosting.

Quoting Jesus, Luke says the disciples were to share the good news to "*all the nations.*" (Luke 24:47).⁹

And there is something about the way Luke writes and the stories he includes that the others don't that highlights, in ways I have really wanted us to see, the stunning priorities of Jesus' kingdom.

It was in the early part of His ministry that Jesus spelled out the focus of His earthly ministry's goals.

The Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom (from Luke's Gospel)

[Luke 4:17] And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll, and found the place where it was written,

[18] "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, [19] "TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."

Back in January, we started following Luke as he showed Jesus living out Isaiah's prophetic passage.

- He healed one crippled man (4:17-25) and He broke legalistic Sabbath traditions that got in the way of obeying God (6:1-11).

⁸ Of all four Gospels, Luke's has the most details about Jesus' birth. And his genealogy of Jesus dates from Jesus not to Abraham (as Matthew's does), but all the way back to Adam.

⁹ Just like Matthew's Gospel also records.

- He forgave one sinful woman (7:36-50), calmed a stormy sea and one, stormy, demon-possessed heart (8:22-39), healed one woman of a chronic disease, and raised one young girl from the dead. (8:40-56)
- He multiplied food to feed thousands (9:12-17), encouraged His followers to pray (11:1-13; 18:1-14), and praised small things - like mustard seeds and leaven - that turn surprisingly large (13:18-22).
- He defined discipleship (14:25-35) and miraculously healed some - but not all. (18:35-43)

And, to be honest, we've barely skimmed the surface of all that Luke told about the ways in which Jesus carried out His ministry. There are so many scenes we haven't taken time to see.¹⁰

All that Luke records of Jesus' life and ministry is an application and an expansion of His promise to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy about the ministry of the Messiah.

And to round out our look at Jesus' topsy-turvy kingdom ways, we're going to see what might arguably have been His most outrageous act of serving the least and the last and the lost.

One Scene to Bring the Message Home (Luke 17:11-19)

Ten Lepers Cry Out to Jesus for Help! (vv. 11-13)

Jesus, on His way to Jerusalem for the last time (v. 11)

Three quarters of the way through Luke we find Jesus on the road. He was traveling south from Galilee to Judea.

And, because we know a good deal about the chronology of His life, we know that Jesus was taking this trip to Jerusalem to die. He was going there for the purpose of taking up His cross for you and for me.

If you have maps in the back of your Bibles, or if you have maps as a part of your Bible app, you might find one titled, "*The Land of Palestine in the Time of Christ*" or something like that.

That map will show that the region located directly between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north is called "*Samaria*."

The Jews who lived in the north and the south generally refused to have anything to do with the Samaritans.¹¹

That is because the Jews considered the Samaritans utterly detestable half-breeds. (And, no, the Samaritans didn't exactly love the Jews, either.)

Luke tells us that Jesus was on the border between Galilee and Samaria when the action begins.

Ten men with leprosy (v. 12)

[Luke 17:12] And as He entered a village, ten men with leprosy who stood at a distance met Him...

Don't miss this: These men have gone out of their way to meet Jesus. They were intentional about seeking Him out. Hold that thought.

Because of their disease (leprosy), they lived in quarantine from the general population.

In the Old Testament, all of Leviticus 13 and 14 is written to address what to do when someone might have leprosy. The tests were conducted with care. Nobody wanted an outbreak of leprosy.

¹⁰ We've not spent time with lots of individuals it would have been great to have gotten to know: Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. Mary and Martha, Zaccheus, the two debtors, children (Luke mentioned children and babies three times), several women who are main characters in his book (Luke includes women more than the other Gospel writes), and the penitent thief on the cross.

¹¹ The Jews would walk many more miles than was necessary to avoid contact with Samaria. Not Jesus. He walked right through Samaria and waded into a conversation with a Samaritan woman, explaining the way of salvation to her.

If the test was positive, the leper was isolated. He or she had to live separate from family and friends and community. The leper was to rip his clothes as a sign to others to stay away.

If someone was walking toward him, he was to cover his mustache and call out *"Unclean! Unclean!"* He was to live all alone. (Leviticus 13:45-46)

As a group, lepers were at the bottom of the social and spiritual totem pole. Everyone looked down on lepers and no one wanted to have anything to do with them.

But they didn't live in a social vacuum. They knew about Jesus and had heard of His reputation as a Healer.

So, without question, the reason these guys went out to meet him as He passed by was because they harbored a hope that in addition to raising the dead and giving sight to the blind, Jesus could also cleanse lepers.¹²

Normally Jews and Samaritans were not friends. But this ten-man group was comprised of nine Jews and one Samaritan, drawn together by their shared nightmare and their common misery.

Parenthetical section: The Tragedy of Leprosy

But, when we think of leprosy, we probably picture large, unsightly tumors covering the body of the diseased.

We may think of disfigured faces and limbs. Sadly, these are both accurate portrayals of the effects of leprosy.¹³

¹² By a merciful euphemism, we commonly refer to leprosy today by the name, "Hanson's Disease."

¹³ In one of his commentaries, Bible scholar William Barclay presents a pitiful description of the effects of leprosy on a sufferer. *"The whole appearance of the face is changed, till the man loses his human appearance and looks, as the ancients said, 'like a lion or a satyr.' The nodules grow larger and larger. They ulcerate. From them there comes a foul discharge. The eyebrows fall out, the eyes become staring. The voice becomes hoarse, and the breath wheezes because of the ulceration of the vocal cords. The hands and the feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of the disease is*

Due in large part to the research of Dr. Paul Brandt, a Christian physician, in recent decades much has been learned about the disease.

We have learned that a major part of the cruelty of leprosy is that it destroys nerves, and especially the ability to sense pain.

This lack of sensitivity to pain robs the leper of the ability to know that something is wrong when water is too hot, or a hammer handle is splintered, or when a shoe rubs the foot the wrong way.

More than anything else, accidental self-mutilation is what destroys a leper's body. It is the lack of sensitivity to pain that causes most of the ravages of the disease.

None of this was known, of course, in the first century. The only thing everyone knew was that leprosy was *"a living death"* and that lepers were to be avoided at all costs.

These ten lepers who went out to meet Jesus approached Him as He walked south toward Jerusalem.

The lepers loudly asked Jesus for mercy (v. 13)

[13] and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

They raised their voices

They ***"raised their voices."*** This was impressive because leprosy very often robs a leper of the ability to speak.

Knowing this, we might not imagine a clear, clean, strong voice crying out. Instead, imagine something more like a hoarse, rasping, pleading cough coming from these ten men.

They were pitiful. But they weren't hopeless. And that is because they saw in Jesus their last chance at a hope for a future.

nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma, and ultimately, death. The sufferer becomes utterly repulsive - both to himself and to others."

They pleaded for mercy (13b)

Why did they leave the confines of their leper's colony to go out to meet Jesus? Obviously, they wanted to be rid of their leprosy.

It is extremely significant, though, that they didn't cry out to Jesus to heal them, or even to cleanse them. They asked Him for mercy. That request for "*mercy*" shows us how the lepers saw themselves.

Mercy is not something the sick patient asks of his doctor or of a miracle worker. Mercy is what the guilty criminal asks of the judge. Mercy is what the sinner pleads from God. These lepers begged Jesus for mercy.

That makes sense, because in the ancient Jewish culture, leprosy was often regarded as a picture of sin itself.

The wasting effects of the disease pictured the damage caused by sin in a person's life. To be a leper was to be unclean. To be a sinner was to be a "moral leper."

These men knew that they had no claim to make on God. They have been rejected by God and by all those they know. All they can ask for or hope for is mercy.

Jesus gave them exactly what they asked for.

Ten Lepers Receive Mercy! (vv. 14-19)

The ten lepers hear the cleansing WORD of Jesus! (v. 14a)

[14a] When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests."

So, what's up with that?

Well, the Old Testament Law (again, Leviticus 13-14) says that when a leper was cleansed from his leprosy, he was to go to the priest to be declared clean.

But when Jesus told them to go to the priest, they were NOT clean. They had active leprosy. Why should they go to the priest?

The priests couldn't *make* anyone clean. Priests could only *declare* that what had been cleansed by God was actually clean. And then, by declaring the person clean, the priest could return that person into the life of the community.

So, what would you have been thinking had you been one of these lepers?

You look at yourself and your friends and see nothing but ugly tumors and disfigured limbs. You hold out your hands and are repulsed at the sight of your own body.

You might be thinking that Jesus was making a cruel joke.

"Jesus is making fun of me."

OR WORSE, *"Jesus wants me to deny how bad things really are. He's pretending that I don't even have leprosy."*

OR EVEN WORSE, *"Jesus can't even see that I am not clean!"*

The lepers may have been thinking any or all of those thoughts.

But soon, one of them suggested, *"Come on, guys. What do we have to lose? Let's go to the priest. Let's just trust Jesus and do what He says to do"* - and off they went.

That first step to go to the priest was a giant "next step." But it wasn't their first next step.

Their FIRST next step had been the trip they took to be on the road Jesus was on to meet Him. Their NEXT next step was when they called out to Him while He passed by. Now, they have taken a THIRD next step by turning to go to the priest while still leprous.

And the merciful healing happened as they were walking to the priest's home.

The ten lepers experience the cleansing TOUCH of Jesus! (v. 14b)

[14b] And as they were going, they were cleansed.

One by one, they began to realize that a cleansing was taking place...while it was taking place.

We wonder.

Did they SEE the change first - the tumors shrinking, the disfigured limbs returning to normal, or did they FEEL it first?

Remember the curse of leprosy.

As much as anything, it is the inability to FEEL. Did they know that God had touched them when they began to feel the sunshine on their faces and the warmth of the breeze through their hair?

Did they feel the delicious sharp pain of the stones on their feet? Did they notice, for the first time in years, the way their shoes didn't fit?

Their cleansing meant that they were sensitized - to pain AND to pleasure. Being sensitized is what being alive is all about!

God's work on behalf of the lepers serves as a model for what He does in the heart and soul of everyone He cleanses. He sensitizes us so that we can experience life in all its fullness.

I think that the lepers recognized their cleansing first by their ability to feel. But, then, they no doubt would have noticed those tumors shrinking, the nodes disappearing, fingers and toes being restored to normal.

Now, watch these guys. They aren't walking anymore. They are running as fast as they can to get to the priest.

All except one.

A grateful Samaritan and the "no thank you" nine (vv. 15-19)

[15] Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, [16] and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan.

Nine (evidently, all of them Jewish) lepers continued on their way to the priest. One turned back. The Samaritan.

Of course, he's just as eager to be declared clean as the others. But he's overcome with gratitude. He is struck with the realization that Somebody acted on his behalf.

Filled with gratitude to Jesus, He glorified God with **"a loud voice."** Not a raspy, hoarse voice. Now it's loud!

The doubly unclean SAMARITAN LEPER would be the least likely candidate to return and give thanks to a Jewish miracle worker. But he was the only one who returned to express gratitude.

The rest of the story shows Jesus' deep disappointment with the "no thank you" nine and their world class display of ingratitude.

And it also reveals how deeply Jesus was moved by the faith response of the Samaritan. He made the Samaritan - the SAMARITAN! - the hero of this story.

The Samaritan was still lying flat on the ground when Jesus spoke to him. Up until this point, Jesus had only been speaking to the bystander.

Now He spoke directly to the healed, cleansed leper.

[19] And He said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has made you well."

Conclusion: APPLYING the Stunning Priorities of Jesus' Kingdom

King Jesus healed ten lepers of their leprosy. Paying attention to lepers wasn't something that kings generally did. Making a hero out of a Samaritan leper is nothing a Jewish king would ever do.

But Jesus is a king unlike any other king. His kingdom priorities are stunning.

He loved and served lepers, the outcast, and the lowly. He sought out and saved sinners. He focused His energies on the least, the last, and the lost.

And here's where that movie I watched last week so moved me.

After reflecting together about how best to reach people for Jesus and how to spread the gospel to their friends, this group of Christians talking in a backyard hit upon, what Dr. Seuss would have called, a "*wonderful, awful idea*."¹⁴

Inspired by what they had watched fly overhead one day, they decided to use a hydrogen blimp to drop tracts and to broadcast messages that would tell their neighbors about Jesus.¹⁵

And yes, the gospel blimp was a ridiculous idea. And it was ridiculous because it was so un-Jesus like. Any impersonal idea about how to spread the message is contrary to the spirit of Jesus.

Luke's Gospel shows Jesus dealing with people in desperate need, in word and in deed, up close and personal.

So, how does this relate to us?

Well, one time, Jesus said, **[Luke 6:40] "A student is not above the teacher; but everyone, when he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."**

By saying that, the Lord was saying that we who train to be like Him, will end up imitating Him in in the way we love God, in our character, and in how we love those most in need of what only He can provide.

There is nothing better we can do to spread the word than (1). to pray that God will do what only He can do and prepare and change hearts, (2). be prepared to truly and honestly share the Gospel message, and (3). help / serve / meet needs in Jesus' Name.

The more personal, the better.¹⁶ The less chance of being paid back for helping, the better. It's fantastic if you're the only one lining up to serve this person (or to serve people like him). It's Jesus-like if you're service doesn't make the news. It's kingdom-worthy if your service gets you ridiculed, or punished.

Among other things, by His loving engagement and miraculous works of power, Jesus was letting people see that God was for them. God was not against them.

He is unleashing us to serve today in all the ways we might save to convince people we know of the same thing.

We are all Samaritan lepers, telling others what God has done for us so that others will find what we have found in Jesus. Life, eternal and abundant.

¹⁴ From "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas"

¹⁵ The film, "The Gospel Blimp" (1967) was based on the book by the same name written by Joseph Bayley.

¹⁶ I have learned that email is better than nothing, but phone is better than email. Video is better than phone - and nothing beats face to face.