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The Holiness of God

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The Holiness of God

“Now on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten men with leprosy met him. They stood at a distance, raised their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ When he saw them he said, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went along, they were cleansed.” —Luke 17:11-14

Ceremonially unclean, cut off from worship at the sanctuary and cut off from fellowship with others in the community, lepers were forced to stay at a distance yelling, “Unclean! Unclean!” Such was the situation for the ten men we read about in our verses for today. Leprosy to the Jews was a disease that, more than any other, bore a mark of God’s displeasure. Lepers were banned outside the city to prevent physical contagion and also to symbolize the person’s separation from the holy camp of Israel. We find this mandated in Numbers and also Deuteronomy:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses: ‘Command the Israelites to expel from the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. You must expel both men and women; you must put them outside the camp, so that they will not defile their camps, among which I live.’” —Numbers 5:1-3

“For the LORD your God walks about in the middle of your camp to deliver you and defeat your enemies for you. Therefore your camp should be holy, so that he does not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.” —Deuteronomy 23:14

The symbolism here blazes like a bolt of lightning in a black sky. Before the work of Jesus on the cross, we are all outside the camp yelling, “Unclean! Unclean! Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” Our bodies, eaten up with sin, powerless to change our condition, we fall condemned before a holy God.

We often are ignorant of the holiness of God. How flippantly we perceive Him. Whenever people in the Bible had an encounter with the great “I AM” they would be overcome by fear. The contrast of God’s holiness and their unholiness was too much for them to bear in their sinful state. We read in Isaiah:

“In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the LORD seated on a high, elevated throne. The hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs stood over him; each one had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and they used the remaining two to fly. They called out to one another, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven’s Armies! His majestic splendor fills the entire earth!’ The sound of their voices shook the door frames, and the temple was filled with smoke. I said, ‘Woe to me! I am destroyed, for my lips are contaminated by sin, and I live among people whose lips are contaminated by sin. My eyes have seen the king, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.’” —Isaiah 6:1-5

Ezekiel relates his experience:

“Then there was a voice from above the platform over their heads when they stood still. Above the platform over their heads was something like a sapphire shaped like a throne. High above on the throne was a form that appeared to be a man. I saw an amber glow like a fire enclosed all around from his waist up. From his waist down I saw something that looked like fire. There was a brilliant light around it, like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds after the rain. This was the appearance of the surrounding brilliant light; it looked like the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I threw myself face down, and I heard a voice speaking.” —Ezekiel 1:25-28

The writer of Hebrews gives us an account of Moses’ encounter:

“For you have not come to something that can be touched, to a burning fire and darkness and gloom and a whirlwind and the blast of a trumpet and a voice uttering words such that those who heard begged to hear no more. For they could not bear what was commanded: ‘If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.’ In fact, the scene was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I shudder with fear.’” — Hebrews 12:18-21

Ceremonial law still in effect, Jesus tells the lepers to go and present themselves to the priest. We need to note He did not cleanse them and say “Go,” but rather He sent them *uncleansed*... and *as they went*, they were healed. Often our faith is tried through our obedience to prove it true. We must act on what we believe.

Become More

“Gratitude is born in hearts that take time to count up past mercies.” —Charles Jefferson

Further Reflections

“We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives.” —Charles Spurgeon

“Grace is the grand and only resource for us all. It is the basis of our salvation; the basis of a life of practical godliness; and the basis of those imperishable hopes which animate us amid the trials and conflicts of this sin-stricken world.” —C H MacIntosh