

## Take a chance on Jesus

Message for Sunday, October 9, 2016  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Luke 17:11-19

**Children's Message:** 1 Thessalonians 5:18,  
“Always be thankful.”

If I give you this great big dish of chocolate ice cream, what will you say? “Thank you,” of course. And if I won't let you have this ice cream, because I know it is filled with poison that would kill you, what should you do? You should still thank me, shouldn't you?

Or if you are sick and I give you a spoonful of very bitter medicine because I know it will make you better, you will thank me, too.

Now, you don't like the bitter medicine at all. And you don't like it when I keep the yummy-looking ice cream from you, either. But you know I am your friend, and you know that everything I do is for your own good. So you thank me even when you don't like the things I do to you.

God gives us a lot of things that we want and things that we like—like chocolate ice cream. When he gives us those things, it is easy to thank him. But sometimes God gives us things we don't like—like the bitter medicine. And other times God does not give us what we want—like the poison ice cream.

Every year on Thanksgiving Day we stop to thank God. But we should thank him *every* day. We thank God when he gives us the things we like and want. But we should thank him also for all the other things he gives us—and even for the things he does not let us have.

Don't forget to say “Thank-you, God” every day.

*Credit: I didn't come up with this at all. This great idea is from Charles Bauer, a minister in New York.*

**Message:** “Take a chance on Jesus”

I used to be scum. How would you like people to call you “the SCAB”?

Do you see all those people wandering around just outside the town gate? I used to be one of them. I used to be a leper.

Do you know what our Law of Moses in the Bible says about people who have leprosy? It says we are unclean, dirty.

Let me tell you about leprosy. It's a disease. It kills the nerves in your body. If you have leprosy in your hands, you can't feel anything. Try to pick up an egg, without having any idea how hard you're squeezing it. You break a lot of eggs.

Leprosy starts in the extremities, in the fingertips and the toes, and works its way up. The skin and the muscles rot away. First the fingers and toes fall off, then the whole hand and foot.

We had no medicine like you people today have. Your doctors can study leprosy with microscopes, and they have discovered how to stop it.

All we knew is that if someone near you has leprosy, you can get it, too.

So when I got leprosy, I had to leave home, and move to the city. Not *in* the city; just outside, with the other lepers.

When we need water for drinking and washing, we may not use the well in town. We have to go find our own somehow.

I have a garden and grow my own food. At first, I tried to sell the extra food—make a little money, you know—but who wants to eat food that a scab touched?

I'm able to work! I'm strong. My fingers are no good for holding a pen, but I can carry a heavy load; I can pull a wagon. But no one wants me. So I have to beg for my living.

It makes me sick—begging like a dog!

A few people take pity on us, and give us a few dollars in the hat each day. “Here, pay your oil bill.” “Thank-you, sir!”

But did you ever notice: they're careful to never get too close. [*Demonstrate person standing away, bending over to deposit money.*]

They take pity on us. They don't like us or love us. Just pity.

A few times a year a peddler comes around. He used to be a leper, he says. One day, he cut himself on a cactus plant, and got some of the cactus juice in the cut. The juice cured him! He had some of the cactus juice with him, and now we could get cured, too! I bought a bottle, and believe me, I paid a good price. It never worked.

Then there are the Holy Men—call themselves Prophets of God. A few times a year, one of them will come to town, and hold a big service. They preach from the Bible about Elisha and Naaman, and how Naaman was cured of leprosy. They take up an offering. Then they call us forward to pray for us.

“If only you would believe, you will be healed!”

Well, I’m not healed. And I don’t believe those Holy Men anymore. I don’t believe in God anymore.

This is the worst time of the year, the fall. It’s getting cold. Because the nerves in my feet are dead, I can’t tell if my feet are cold. They could be frozen, and I wouldn’t even know it.

There’s a rich man who lets us use an old cattle shed, once the animals have moved out for the winter. But for now, we just suffer.

One morning, I’m by the side of the road begging. I see a crowd coming. A kid comes running ahead. I holler out, “Hey, what’s going on?” He says something about Jesus of Nazareth coming to town.

Jesus? I heard about him. Another Holy Man! Ha! I’ve got no more use for them.

But... Jesus? He’s the one I’ve heard people tell me about. I’ve heard that he healed a blind man, and he can see now; that there was a woman who was always bleeding, and now she’s fine. I even heard... that he... cured a leper.

NO! It can’t be true! Once you’ve got leprosy, you’re finished. Your only hope is to die and get it over with. It’s impossible.

But just yesterday, one of my buddies told me about another leper he healed. What if it’s true? What if

Jesus really can save me, but I never give him a chance?

We get together and talk it over, the ten of us. We decide we’ll give him a try.

The crowd gets closer. In the middle of all the attention is a man, walking. All the other Holy Men rode big horses and wore fancy clothes. He walks like anyone else, and he wears just a plain coat.

He’s coming closer. We stand off the road, out of the way, so that no one has to come close.

Just as he’s about to go by us, we start shouting, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us.” We expect him to ignore us.

He stops. He turns and looks at us. “What do you want?”

“Jesus, Master, have pity on us. We want to be healed of leprosy.”

He doesn’t say a word. He starts walking toward us. He’s coming closer. I’m at the front of the line, so he comes right up to me. He looks me in the eyes. Then—he puts out his hand. He wants to shake my hand.

SHAKE MY HAND! He wants to touch me! Now I know he’s crazy! But he’s still there.

Slowly, I lift my own hand to his. He grabs it in his big carpenter hand and shakes it firmly.

DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT’S BEEN SINCE SOMEONE TOUCHED ME?

Now he’s reaching up with his other hand and he’s laying it on my head—right on my scab.

I never told you how I got my name. Look. Right after I got leprosy, a big patch of my hair fell out. There’s a sore that never healed; it’s always infected. That’s why they call me Scab.

He put his hand right there on my scab. He wasn’t afraid.

*[Put head down, cup hands over face, overcome by memories and emotions. When come back up, tears are streaming down my face.]*

I remember when I had to leave my home. My mother helped me pack, then went with me to the door. I stepped outside and turned around to say goodbye. I knew this was the last time I would ever see Mom.

She stood in the doorway for the longest time. Her body ached to hold me one more time, to tell me how much she loved me. But I could see in her eyes that she was afraid to touch me. MY OWN MOTHER: AFRAID OF ME! Finally, she closed her eyes, turned around, walked back in the house and shut the door.

But Jesus isn't afraid to touch me!

Now he's going down the line, shaking hands, and laying hands on everyone.

When he's finished, he turns and says to all of us, "Do as the Law of Moses commands. Go to the priest and show him that you're alright now."

He thinks he's healed us! He really is crazy!

But he touched me. No one else has ever done that.

Others pity me. But Jesus loves me. He's not afraid of me. He loves me so much that he's willing even to risk getting leprosy and suffer our disease for us.

Even though we don't believe it, we go into town, just for his sake.

After we've gone only 100 meters, I step on a nail. "Ouch!" *[bouncing on one leg.]* I start to swear. I lift up my foot, and it's got a big gash in it.

WAIT! I felt my foot! I can feel pain! My foot is healed! *[putting hand to head in amazement.]* What? Look! My scab is gone! I'm healed! *[jumping up and down.]* I'M HEALED!!

My friends are all jumping up and down, dancing around, laughing. We're all healed!

We continue on into town. Wait! What about Jesus? I want to thank him. None of the others comes with me. I run back to where he is.

"Jesus, Master, I was as good as dead, but you have given my life back to me. From now on, I want to follow you, to serve you, to be your disciple. For you really loved me!"

*(back to Bruce now)*

This story has a happy ending. But what would have happened if the leper had not taken a chance on Jesus? He would never have found out what Jesus can do.

There may be some here today who are like that leper. You've heard about Jesus, you're intrigued by him, even attracted to him. But you've never taken the step of surrendering your life to Jesus.

I want to encourage you, to challenge you, to take a chance on Jesus. Put your trust in him day by day, following his way. You'll never know what he can do in your life unless you do that.