

## The Unending Mercies of Christ towards Marginalised Persons

Bible Verse : **Luke 17:11-19**

Main Bible Verse: *“And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”*  
**(Luke 17:13, KJV)**

### Prior Preparation

Prepare the stall with the notice board on leprosy awareness next to the church. Practice to conduct a meaningful awareness using the information pamphlets and the information on the notice board.

### Introduction to Sermon

Pastor: *“I warmly welcome every one of you to leprosy awareness Sunday.”*

### Background to Sermon

During his time of ministry, Jesus travelled from Judah (South of Israel) towards Galilee (North of Israel). His place of birth, Bethlehem, was located in Judah while Nazareth where he grew up was located in Samaria or Galilee which is in Northern Israel.

The village mentioned in the first verse of this passage is located on the slope between Galilee and Samaria of Northern Israel. Jesus was travelling downward from Galilee towards Judah. This sloping road was a lonely one which was not used much by people. However, Jesus used this way quite often. Various bible commentaries state that many persons affected by leprosy and other socially rejected persons stayed beside this road. In these times, even though there were great religious and socio-cultural differences between the Samaritans and Jews, it can be derived that there were both Samaritans and Jews among the ten leprosy affected persons **(Luke 17:16-17)**. In the above context, this is a very important and rare incident. The fact that the leprosy affected Samaritans and Jews gathered together in a village bordering Samaria to meet Jesus shows that they put aside their race, religious and cultural differences in hope of healing from Him.

Jesus paid special attention to leprosy which was an epidemic in these times. In Matthew 10:9, when He sends out his disciples to ministry, He speaks of healing the sick and specially mentions about leprosy patients. Accordingly, it is important that we bring to our attention such epidemics within the Christian Church.

Jesus fore mostly paid attention to how leprosy affected persons were a socio-religiously discriminated and excluded group. Even though He was certain that they will receive physical healing, He knew that if they disobeyed the regulations of the priests they would not be able to overcome the social stigma and this is why He commanded them to appear before the priests. Similarly, this passage makes it clear that the persons affected by leprosy knew Jesus' name very well.

*'And they lifted up their voices, and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (Luke 17:13).* The Greek word for "**MERCY**" is "**Eleeo**" or "**Eleos**". This could be explained as when a little child commits a certain wrong, the loving act of gently embracing him/her instead of reacting impulsively and thus acting towards freeing the child from that particular circumstance and the shock he/she has undergone because of the circumstance that led to him/her to commit that fault. In this manner, we too can show the Lord's mercy towards those who are around us.

- Help those who are facing tribulations or those who are seeking relief from their troubles
- The willingness to help those who are entangled in chaotic situations
- The characteristic of being constantly helpful or being merciful

Today, Christ requires for "**Eleeo**" from the entire Christian Church. His Word states "*Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart*" (Proverbs 3:3).

## **Application**

Today, it is your Church that represents Christ in your locality. It is also your church that is Christ's eyes, hands and feet in the midst of your community; you are also the one who speaks on His behalf. People still there who are crying out for His mercy.

- Do persons who are affected and discriminated because of such diseases today know that they can come to your church seeking His love and kindness?

The bible states that they knew the name of Jesus and that they called Him by His name, begging for kindness (**Luke 17:13**). It was the Lord's identity to show kindness and love to such human beings. Therefore, such people were drawn to Him. Today, are persons with such needs drawn to you who are Christ's representatives? Jesus never presented them with any limitations nor conditions neither did He coerce them in any way. Similarly, He never forced them to come to Him. He never expected anything from them. Simply, He only showed them kindness. Today, what is your identity and your church's identity among your

community? (How do they introduce you and your church as a Christian community?)

- Do you and your church possess intelligent and sufficient knowledge to help such people?

According to Matthew 8:1-4, another person affected by leprosy came to the Lord and begged of Him to make him clean. Matthew 8:3 states that He kept His hand upon him. In this era, persons affected by leprosy did not have permission to approach ordinary people. However, this person came to the Lord. Even though there was a false belief that leprosy spreads through touch, medical opinions state that it is not so. Leprosy spreads through drops of saliva released to the air when one coughs or sneezes. Most are unaware that leprosy is not a skin disease and that it affects a person's internal nervous system. Even though the people of that time were unaware of this, the Lord knew it. Today an exhibition stall has been prepared by the church leaders with the aim of giving you the correct understanding of leprosy. At the end of this service, you can go to this stall and get to know about leprosy. I request that you make the most of this opportunity and that you visit the stall.

- Will you be happy to speak and interact with such persons?

Jesus was not afraid to speak with persons affected by leprosy. He listened to them. He paid attention to their real needs. Are you ready to look at them like Christ did and can you talk and listen to them as affectionately as Jesus?

### **Jesus paid attention to the social stigma levelled against them and to their psychosocial health**

He asked them to present themselves to the priest (**Luke 17:14**) knowing that as they were on their way that they would be healed (**Luke 17:17-18**). Just like present times, the priests in the time of Jesus wielded a great influence in society. They had the authority to reinstate the social rights of those affected by leprosy. Social stigma has a negative effect on a person's health. This is because even if he completely recovers from his illness, he is unable to enjoy his good health due to separation and discrimination from society. Even though they attain physical health they need social acceptance, self-dignity and equal human rights in order to attain mental health. **Leprosy is no longer a question without an answer.**

Today, this illness can be cured. Thanks to help from doctors and health workers as well as the MTD treatment which is given free of charge, thousands of leprosy patients are healed today. We should praise God for this because in a world that bows to money, it is a miracle that treatment is freely available for such illnesses.

However, in the present, the problem without a solution is the stigma and discrimination that such persons continue to face. In such instances, their interconnectivity with society is broken and they are at a risk of experiencing depression. Thereby, they can disconnect from their associates and fall into a position where they are alone and without any help. This is a dangerous situation. It is essential that such persons receive psychosocial support. Thus, these disconnected persons' networks can be reinstated and a safe environment can be constructed around them. The Word of God states "*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves*". Psychosocial is the interconnectivity between each person's thoughts and behaviour patterns and the various social factors. When a person becomes a patient and if he/she faces discrimination due to an illness like leprosy, he/she will face challenges from society. Then these persons will:

- avoid treatment due to the fear that others will get to know of their condition
- be unable to afford travelling for their treatment as they lose their job because of the illness
- distance themselves from those who are around to help them
- think that there is no one to help them
- lose the protection received from the family,
- Their health condition will take a turn for the worse.

Therefore, reestablishing their social networks is very important towards the patients' psychosocial health.

In this bible verse, Luke the General Physician states that the persons affected by leprosy called out to Jesus from afar (**Luke 16:13a**). In this era, religious laws limited the personal connections of leprosy patients. These limitations were imposed because it was an incurable disease. However, as medication is now available, this should not continue to be the situation. Thus, people affected should not hide in fear. They should not be separated from society. What is important is that persons with symptoms receive immediate treatment. Today, unfortunately, many delay in taking treatment and many persons affected by leprosy and other similar illnesses are terribly discriminated and shunned from society. Then, our true Christian responsibility is "**Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up**" (**Romans 15:2**).

Stigma and discrimination are mainly twofold. That is, self-stigma and separation of oneself from society and social stigma and being shunned by society. These two forms both reap dangerous results. Stigma and discrimination usually takes place because of a person's outer appearance. Leprosy can change one's physical appearance. However, there are medicines available today that can completely cure leprosy. Yet, there are persons who are living with self-stigma and social stigma.

#### **How stigma and discrimination affects people:**

- They become discouraged
- Bitterness can develop within them
- They are vulnerable to suicide

- They can become irrational
- They can fall ill due to other illnesses
- They can lose self-confidence and dignity
- They will be unable to perform the work assigned to them.

**The Word of the Lord says:**

*“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”*

**(Romans 15:7)**

**The effects of accepting such persons:**

- They will become interested and enthusiastic
- They will be able to effectively engage in their day-to-day activities
- Their image will develop and change
- Their abilities will develop
- They will become healthy
- Their lifespan will increase

Today, as Christians who are His children filled with kindness we must obey His command; *“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.”* **(Proverbs 3:27)**. We must go in search of those who yearn for kindness and on this leprosy Sunday let us dedicate ourselves to show kindness towards such persons.