Our study comes from Luke 17:11-19. Jesus is no longer in Bethany because after He raised Lazarus from the dead, the Sanhedrin Council planned to murder Jesus as soon as possible (John 11:47-54). They concluded that Jesus was a threat to them because He was performing too many signs and they were concerned that people would believe in Him. Therefore, Jesus left Bethany and traveled to Ephraim to escape (John 11:54) since it was not yet time for Jesus to die on the cross. The planned date for His death was two to three months away. Jesus died on April 1, A.D. 33. This means the events described in our study are estimated to have occurred in the months of January through March of A.D. 33. The gospel of Luke gives us more information than the other gospels about Jesus’ ministry after He left Bethany (John 11:54) and then returned to Bethany (Luke 19:28-29; John 11:55). We will discover that during Jesus’ travels He was devoted to the preaching of the gospel. Our study is about ten lepers who encountered Jesus.

**Jesus Starts His Journey to Jerusalem.** The first verse in our study is Luke 17:11.

*While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. Luke 17:11 (NASB)*

We are given two important pieces of information. First, we are told that Jesus passed through Samaria and Galilee. Since we are told that the last city He and the disciples were in was Ephraim (John 11:54), this means He had already left Jerusalem and then continued moving up into Galilee. For some reason the Holy Spirit did not choose to reveal what cities they visited in Samaria and Galilee. The second piece of information we are given is that Jesus is now returning to Jerusalem. This means He and his disciples passed through Samaria to Galilee and are now traveling back to Jerusalem.

**Ten Lepers Ask For Mercy.** The next two verses tell us that when Jesus entered a village ten lepers called to Him.

*As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him, and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Luke 17:12-13 (NASB)*

Leprosy is mentioned over fifty times in the Bible. It was a dreaded disease. In ancient times leprosy could not be cured, but that is not true today. Brunilda Nazario, M.D. at WebMD writes this about leprosy,
Leprosy is an infectious disease that causes severe, disfiguring skin sores and nerve damage in the arms, legs, and skin areas around your body. Leprosy has been around since ancient times. Outbreaks have affected people on every continent.

But leprosy, also known as Hanson’s disease, isn’t that contagious. You can catch it only if you come into close and repeated contact with nose and mouth droplets from someone with untreated leprosy. Children are more likely to get leprosy than adults.

Leprosy primarily affects your skin and nerves outside your brain and spinal cord, called the peripheral nerves. It may also strike your eyes and the thin tissue lining the inside of your nose.

The main symptom of leprosy is disfiguring skin sores, lumps, or bumps that don’t go away after several weeks or months. The skin sores are pale-colored.

Treatment depends on the type of leprosy that you have. Antibiotics are used to treat the infection. Doctors recommend long-term treatment, usually for 6 months to a year. If you have severe leprosy, you may need to take antibiotics longer. Antibiotics can’t treat the nerve damage that comes with leprosy.

Leprosy is caused by a slow-growing type of bacteria called Mycobacterium leprae (M. leprae). Leprosy is also known as Hansen’s disease, after the scientist who discovered M. leprae in 1873.

Leprosy results in disfigurement since the numbed body parts cannot feel and, consequently, are worn away through abrasive contact with surfaces. Additionally, the body reabsorbs the affected fingers, toes, nose, ear lobes and other surface areas. Thus the person looks disfigured.

This is the disease these ten men had. Their disease was not curable by human medicine in the time in which they lived. In their day leprosy could only be cured by God. In Leviticus 13-14 God instructed the Israelites to go to a priest and seek guidance. The priests were responsible for identifying the leprosy and providing instruction for the individual infected (Leviticus 13:45-59). The instructions included isolation from others outside the camp, burning of clothes: leather and fabrics.

Leviticus 13 - 14 was called the Law of Leprosy (Leviticus 13:59). There are many details in the law. Numbers 5:2 also required that lepers live outside the camp of Israel in the wilderness. In summary, leprosy was incurable in ancient times. Consequently, lepers were forced to live by themselves. That is why we are told, “As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him...” This helps us understand why these lepers were outside the village, and that is where they met Him. They met him at the moment He entered the village. It also explains why they stood at a distance and raised their voices in order to be heard.

When Jesus approached the village, they cried aloud, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” We are not told how they knew He was Jesus. We are only told that they knew He was passing by and, so, they cried out to Him. Somehow they had heard that
Jesus could heal and they believed He could. They were not looking for a spiritual savior but a physical savior. Jesus was their only hope to be free from this incurable and paralyzing disease!

They called Him Jesus and Master. They knew His name, but they did not understand who He was—Lord of all. The Greek word for “Master” in this verse is not the Greek word for Lord, which is 

kurios. The Greek these men used was epi-

states. It refers to someone of high status, such as a leader. This reveals they did not understand that Jesus was actually Lord of all creation. Yes, they believed He could heal, but they missed His identity. To them He was simply a healer.

We are told these ten lepers begged for mercy. The Greek word for “mercy” is 

eleeo. It is a special word that refers to kindness shown to someone who cannot help themselves. They could not help themselves and they knew it. They could not heal themselves. The priests could not heal. Their experience told them that no one in the first century A.D. could heal them. But they had heard Jesus healed all types of diseases. Matthew 4:24-25 gives us a list of the various ailments that Jesus healed.

The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. Matthew 4:24-25 (NASB)

We are told in this passage that the news about Him had spread everywhere.

Leprosy was like sin. Once a person had leprosy, the individual could not be healed and was a leper the rest of their life. Leviticus 13:45 required the leper to announce to everyone that they were unclean. They were to cry out, “Unclean.” Lepers were unclean. In the first century A.D., leprosy was a perfect picture of sin. Just as anyone who had leprosy was called unclean, so we are called sinners because we sin. Just as lepers could not heal themselves, so we cannot remove our sin. Just as lepers will die of their leprosy, so we are born spiritually dead because of our sin. Leprosy helps us understand that unless we do something about our sin, we will go to hell.

Our sinful condition cannot be cured by modern medicine. Sin is not a defect, a disease, or a mental condition. Sin is a spiritual condition that cannot be cured by medicine. Only God can help us in our sinful condition. Sin is not communicable. Instead it is inherited from our parents and they inherited it from their parents. In turn, they inherited sin from Adam and Eve. Leprosy symbolizes sin from which there is no cure. Everyone at birth is spiritually unclean. Only God can solve our sin problem.

JESUS PHYSICALLY HEALS NON-BELIEVERS. Now we return to the ten lepers. How did Jesus respond to the pleas of these ten lepers? Verse 14 says that He healed them from a distance. Jesus did not touch them, say a chant, announce that the healing was in the name of God, or use some special words. Jesus did not use gimmicks. He did not seek to impress a crowd and obtain a following. On this occasion Jesus interviewed them about their sin so that a crowd would become sympathetic with them. No one was slain in the Holy Spirit, fell to the ground or received a “holy zap.” Jesus simply told them to go and show themselves to the priest.

When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. Luke 17:14 (NASB)

The Greek word that is translated as “show” is 

epideiknymi. While “to show” is its general meaning, a more accurate meaning is “to show for examination.” That is, let the priest examine you. We can only imagine how surprised the priests were when they examined these men and discovered that they were no longer lepers. Later in Acts 6:7, we are told that many of the priests became Christians. We can only wonder if the priests who examined these men were among those who believed.

While we are not told anything specific as to what happened to the bodies of these men, I believe that any leprous parts of their bodies were fully restored: fingers, nose, ears, toes, hands, and face, for example. The feeling was complete. This was not a time delayed healing, where the men had to continue believing to realize “their full healing.” They went immediately to the priests completely restored and well. But this healing did
not save them from their sins. They were still sinners and not Christians or believers.

What is truly amazing about this event is that Jesus healed these unbelieving lepers. It is an error to think that God heals only Christians since this is a perfect example that God will heal anyone He chooses to heal. These unbelieving lepers begged for mercy and God healed. We forget at times that John 3:16 teaches that God loves the world, and not just Christians. Acts 14:16-17 reminds us that God does good to all men.

In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.

Acts 14:16-17 (NASB)

God also heals and forgives the sins of those who are believing in Jesus. But when Jesus healed these men He did not forgive their sins. They did not obtain eternal life. That is the message of verses 15-19.

Jesus Saves Those Who Believe. But one of these men, when he realized that he had been healed, returned to thank and glorify Jesus. That is the message of verses 15-18.

Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine — where are they? Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” Luke 17:15-18 (NASB)

Verses 15-16 and 18 tell us that only one man returned and glorified God for his healing. Jesus confirms in verse 18 that this Samaritan was a foreigner. He did not live among the Jews.

First Insight — We Are To Always Be Thankful. It is common for teachers to emphasize that this man was a Samaritan and the other nine men were Jews and that only the Samaritan had a thankful heart. Nine Jewish men were not thankful but the Samaritan was thankful. Teachers typically emphasize that the outcast is an example to everyone, especially Christians, that we should be thankful. They point out that people are basically not thankful and often ungrateful.
Consequently we need to be as thankful as the Samaritan. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 reminds us to be thankful always.

Second Insight — True Faith Believes Jesus Is God. The second insight is that as this man was walking to the priest, he finally understood that Jesus was God. Only God could have healed him. That is why He returned to Jesus, fell at Jesus’ feet, gave thanks, and worshiped Him. Notice that he worshiped Jesus. To worship anyone who is not God and to receive worship from anyone would have been blasphemy. In Acts 10:25-26 Cornelius, a Gentile, fell at the apostle Peter’s feet and worshiped Him, but Peter stopped him and explained that he was just a man.

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am just a man.” Acts 10:25-26 (NASB)

Later in Acts 14:11-15, the apostle Paul and Barnabas had the same experience. Notice the people thought they were gods and watch Paul’s response:

When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have become like men and have come down to us.” And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. Acts 14:11-15 (NASB)

The apostles Peter and Paul refused the worship of others, but Jesus received the Samaritan’s worship. The Samaritan’s outward behavior reveals that he believed Jesus was God. Since true faith believes Jesus was and is God, this reveals the Samaritan had true faith.

Third Insight — God and Not Faith Healed Them. A third important insight is that this man’s belief did not heal him—God did. Notice that the Samaritan’s healing occurred after he left Jesus and walked to the priest. He believed Jesus was God after he realized that he had been miraculously healed. It is not uncommon for people to believe in God after God has performed a miracle in someone’s life.

Yet, others in their arrogance rule out the possibility that God has healed them. Romans 1:21 describes them.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Romans 1:21 (NASB)

Here God says that unbelievers are not thankful and fail to accept the truth that God is in control of their body and is the one who heals. In Exodus 4:11 God said that He can cause illness and healing.

The LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” Exodus 4:11 (NASB)

Nine of the lepers rejected the truth that God had healed them. Only one responded to the truth. The Samaritan realized that Jesus had healed him. His healing was not coincidence or an act of magic.

Unfortunately, many think that faith results in healing. I remember as a young boy that my father prayed that God would heal me of my asthma. He was following the instructions of a television evangelist, but I was not healed. Supposedly, the instructions, if followed correctly, would result in healing, but it did not. My father was disappointed when I was not healed. But I am thankful I was not healed, because a man would have received the credit and praise for my healing. Only God should receive the praise for healing.

Notice that Jesus did not tell them to visit a doctor, but a priest. Jesus healed ten lepers all at the same time. Now how can a person miss that startling fact? The healing of ten lepers at the same moment in time is truly a miracle.

Fourth Insight — God’s Common Grace Heals. The fourth insight is that God provides for non-Christians in many dif-
ferent ways, even when we do not believe in God as we have previously discovered (Acts 14:16-17). That is called Common Grace. That is why Jesus healed all ten unbelieving lepers. Their physical healing did not require faith.

Did you notice that Jesus did not say the other ten lepers had faith? Yet, Jesus’ point is that only one of the ten lepers who were healed gave thanks. Scripture reveals that the resurrection of the dead man named Lazarus did not require his faith. Dead men do not have faith. Other times, God requires faith for healing, such as the faith of the elders who pray for the healing of another believer when the illness is due to sin (James 5:15).

Fifth Insight — Samaritan Was Saved By Faith In Jesus.
The fifth insight is found in Luke 17:19.

And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.” Luke 17:19 (NASB)

Now this verse appears to say that the Samaritan’s faith had made him well. We have already discovered that faith is not a requirement for healing. Yes, all ten lepers believed that Jesus could heal them, but only one of them had saving faith. All faith is not saving faith. Nine of the ten lepers believed Jesus could heal them because they had heard the news about Jesus’ healing (Matthew 4:24-25). Their faith was superficial. They were seeking physical healing, not spiritual healing.

It is common for many to believe that Jesus told this man that he was physically healed because he had faith. But the Greek word that is translated as “well” in verse 19 is sozo. This word does not refer to physical healing. Notice that in verse 14 when we were told the ten lepers were cleansed, a different Greek word was used. It was katharizon, which means “to cleanse” or “to purify.” In verse 15 we are told the Samaritan was healed. The Greek word used for “healed” is iaomai. It is a medical term which means, “to be well again,” “to be cured,” or “to be restored.” These two words help us understand that sozo does not literally mean “to be well” or “to be healed.” While translators will sometimes translate the word as “well,” its literal meaning is “saved.” Sozo occurs one hundred and seven times in the New Testament. Over eighty percent of the time, this word is translated as “save” or “to save.” A few examples are Matthew 1:21; 10:22; 16:25; 24:13; Mark 8:35; 10:26; Luke 7:50; 18:26; 19:10; John 3:17; Acts 2:21; 15:1; 16:31; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Timothy 1:15. That is, Jesus clearly said that this man had been spiritually saved. This man believed in Jesus Christ and that resulted in eternal life. John 3:16 says that anyone who believes in Jesus has eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NASB)

Acts 16:31 and Romans 10:9 give us the same truth.

They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Acts 16:31 (NASB)

. . . that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved . . . Romans 10:9 (NASB)

Romans 5:1-2 states that we are justified, or declared to be righteous, as a result of faith. That faith results in a life that is lived in the sphere of grace. True Christians have hope of eternal life with God.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1-2 (NASB)

Jesus did not say that the Samaritan’s faith had healed him. He said that the Samaritan’s faith had given him eternal life. In truth, the Samaritan’s faith was a gift from God (Acts 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:1). The Samaritan had been physically and spiritually saved. He believed in Jesus and he was saved. He gained forgiveness of sins and, as a result, eternal life.

Conclusion. The message of Luke 17:11-19 is that God heals unbelievers and believers, just as He provides water and
food (Acts 14:16-17). In theology this is called Common Grace. That is, God provides grace to all. But saving grace is granted only to the elect, to those who believe in Jesus Christ. It reveals God’s righteousness and love for both believers and unbelievers. The Samaritan is an example of a man who recognized that God had healed him. Then he responded by believing in Jesus. He was both physically healed and saved from eternal punishment and had gained eternal life. God received the praise for both his physical and spiritual healing. Praise God for this fabulous reminder that God alone heals. He may use a doctor, but He is the ultimate doctor. God is the real physician and He receives the glory for our healing!