

Jesus is Willing 5-30-04

Matthew 8:1-4 (NIV)

¹When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ²A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." ³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

The words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount have shown us that His perspective is truly the revelation of heaven. It is so unselfish, so God focused, so demanding of a heart transformation, that we realize no man is able in his own willpower to live it. (Romans 3:10-11) But what follows His message is His perfect demonstration of living it. Matthew follows those three chapters of teaching with one chapter of seven miracles that not only confirm Jesus' words are from heaven, but show us that the message can be lived. Jesus closed that sermon with a call to practice His words, not just to hear them. Then He went about showing us how. (1 Peter 2:21)

The chapter begins with Jesus coming down from the mountain and large crowds following. Remember that when He went up, His disciples followed. (Matthew 5:1) If the crowds made it there to hear the words, they were slower in following on the way up, but coming down, everyone is following. Sometimes it is easier to follow, especially when Jesus is going in a direction that is easy for us, the direction we want to go any way. It is the climb up to hear what He would change in our life that brings out our reluctance to follow. But now, going in the direction that is easy for us, down from the mountain of His challenging words, we face His challenging example in the valley.

Some of us, on the other hand, want to stay on the mountain and just contemplate the words. Down in the valley is where we have to live them. Like Peter, we want to build some tents and just stay there. (Matthew 17:4) But revelation on the mountain is for our application in the valley. Without the application in the valley, the mountaintop experience is useless in our lives and the lives of others. The mountaintop experience only has value as it is applied in the valley.

The first confrontation in the valley is with a leper who came to Jesus. This story is recorded in Mark and Luke also. Luke tells us that this man was not only a leper, but covered, or full, of leprosy. (Luke 5:12) That probably means that the form of leprosy he had was the kind that breaks out in oozing sores on the body. In the latter stages it covers most of the body and this was Dr. Luke's description of this man. It was a horrible disease, not only because of what it did to the body, but also because of the social consequences.

E. W. G. Masterman writes: "No other disease reduces a human being for so many years to so hideous a wreck." It might begin with little nodules that go on to ulcerate. The ulcers develop a foul discharge; the eyebrows fall out; the eyes

Commented [notes1]: ¹⁰As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. Romans 3:10-11 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²¹To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, Matthew 5:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁴Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Matthew 17:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹²While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. Luke 5:12 (NIV)

become staring; the vocal chords become ulcerated, and the voice becomes hoarse, and the breath wheezes. The hands and feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of that kind of leprosy is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma and ultimately death.

—*Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)*

There were other forms of leprosy that attack the nervous system. It is actually a microbe that causes the disease. This form of the disease causes a loss of sensation and the gradual decay of the extremities. Muscles shrivel as the tendons contract. Ulcerations appear on the hands and feet. The fingers, toes, and nose are first fall off, and eventually the hands and feet. It can take twenty to thirty years to literally die by inches.

As horrible as the disease is, the social implications were as severe. The leper could not enter a walled city. They were not to come within six feet of another person. They had to warn passers-by with shouts of "unclean". (Leviticus 13:45) They were to wear a torn robe, leave their hair uncombed, and cover the lower portion of their face.

Several times in Israel's history God struck people with leprosy as a judgment upon their sin. We might even say it was an outward manifestation of their inner sin. King Uzziah came down with it for presuming to offer sacrifice in the priest's place.

(2 Chronicles 26:19) Miriam was afflicted for murmuring against Moses' choice in a wife. (Numbers 12:10) Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was cursed with leprosy for taking the financial offering from Naaman, the Syrian leper who was cured.

(2 Kings 5:27) It is natural then that the Israelites saw lepers as people cursed by God. There was little compassion for them. Some rabbi would not buy food on a street where a leper had passed. A few even boasted about chasing lepers away with stones. They were considered the living dead. Just putting their head in a doorway defiled that dwelling.

Now imagine the loneliness and feeling of worthlessness that a leper would feel. Never a touch from a loved one. No kind words would come to your ears, not even a common greeting. The only person you could communicate with was someone in the same sorry state as yourself. Your family might leave you food, but even they would not come near. Hostility met you wherever you went. What a grievous and lonely life to live!

In Nagasaki, after the atomic bomb was dropped, thousands of radiation sick people tried to find help in surrounding towns. They were usually turned away because people feared that what they had was contagious. It must have been unbearably difficult to be in such pain and confusion and be chased away because of fear. The leper of Jesus' day had a similar lot.

Yet, somehow, this leper recognized the divinity of Jesus. Did he hear His words from a distance? Did he see Him heal some other outcast of society? We can only guess, but something caused him to hope that Jesus would do for him what no one else would ever venture. There was no treatment in Scripture for leprosy. There was only a detailed description for the offering when one was cured, but who was ever cured? When Naaman the Syrian came to the King of Israel for a cure, the king answered, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?" (2 Kings 5:7) Only divine

Commented [notes6]: ⁴⁵"The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'
Leviticus 13:45 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ¹⁹Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead.
2 Chronicles 26:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁰When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy;
Numbers 12:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ²⁷Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow
2 Kings 5:27 (NIV)

intervention could cure a leper, as when Naaman was cured by dunking in the Jordan seven times.

Lonely and desperate, this man approached Jesus and fell on his knees. The word can be translated worship or kneel before another. The action implied worship. Something made this leper believe Jesus to be divine. He humbled himself and submitted himself in the posture of a worshipping servant and said these amazing words, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." He wasn't asking, "Master, are you willing?" He was making a declaration of faith and, I believe, a trust in Jesus' willingness. He approached Jesus like he never would have approached any other rabbi. He approached with confidence in Jesus' compassion.

Mark tells us that Jesus was moved with compassion. (Mark 1:41) Jesus' emotions were stirred. He saw the pitiful condition of this poor man and felt his sorrow and pain. I want to make a comparison for you to consider. In the three Old Testament examples of God dealing with people with leprosy, He was dealing with sin. God was isolating them from the community of believers because they were so set in their sin. So, as a metaphor, the disease of leprosy can picture sin. That does not mean that this man was afflicted because of sin, but that the disease can be a picture of sin.

Commented [notes10]: ⁴¹And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. Mark 1:41 (KJV)

What does it do to us? Sin is rebellion against God's will and God's ways. It is going our own stubborn way in spite of knowing God is directing us in a different way. First, it causes us to lose sensation. Paul says of those in sin, "Having lost all sensitivity..." (Ephesians 4:19) We become dead to the loving, gentle touch of God's Spirit directing our lives. We harden ourselves so often that we become numb like a leper. There is a gradual decay in our life. (2 Timothy 3:13) Sin slowly erodes away our lives like leprosy kills the extremities. Sores develop. Sin causes painful spots in our lives. Every time we touch one of those spots an infectious poison spills out. (Hebrews 12:15)

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁹Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. Ephesians 4:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹³while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:13 (NIV)

We are isolated. (1 Corinthians 5:11) Sin causes us to live for self and separates us from true companionship, both in marriage and in friendships. Sin is contagious. We should be yelling "unclean" and keeping our distance, for it is truly a contagious and devastating disease that we carry. We don't realize the loneliness in our lives is a direct result of this disease. But where will we turn? No one wants to deal with my disease; they have their own to deal with. And those religious people think I'm going to pollute them.

Commented [notes13]: ¹⁵See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Hebrews 12:15 (NIV)

There is only one place to go, to Jesus. He is the One that will not chase us away with rocks, but instead has compassion on us. "Jesus, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Notice he doesn't say heal me, but make me clean. This may have been the first leper to come to Jesus for healing. He may have wondered, "What will He say? Will He tell me I deserve it? Will He tell me it is my own fault? He has compassion on everyone else, perhaps He will even have compassion on me."

As he approached Jesus, he saw a look he had never seen before. It was a look of love and concern. Jesus look said, "I will not abhor you, for my heart feels the torture in your heart." Then, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. The

leper's may have thought, "Oh! A touch! Human contact, no! Divine contact. Not a stone, but tenderness. He broke the six-foot rule and risked this horrendous disease for me! Am I defiling Him, making Him unclean? But wait, the touch has done something. Instead of my communicating death to Him, He is communicating health and life to me!" (Matthew 23:19)

Simultaneously He hears the heart of Jesus in these words, *"I am willing. Be clean."* Did you hear Him? I mean did YOU hear Him? He says to you sinner, to you selfish, gossiping, fearful, greedy person like me, *"I am willing. Be clean. Immediately he was cured of his leprosy."*

Not quite sure if He can do that, are you? Can He cleanse a heart that is black as night, filthy, defiled and rotting? Can He really turn a sinner into a saint? Listen to the power of His word, *for he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm* (Psalms 33:9 (NIV)). He said, *"Let there be light, and there was light."* (Genesis 1:3) He said to the wind and the waves, *"Be still!"* (Mark 4:39) He said to the dead little girl, *"Maid, I say to you arise."* (Mark 5:41) He said to deaf and mute man, *"Be opened!"* (Mark 7:34) He said to the boy in his coffin, *"Young man, I say to you, get up!"* (Luke 7:14) He said to Lazarus in his grave, *"Come out!"* (John 11:43) And He says to you self-centered, angry man or woman, boy our girl, worried about the judgment to come but kneeling before the living Lord of lords, He says to you, *"I am willing. Be clean!"* "In the moral world He is as mighty as in the outer universe." C.H.S. *"Be clean!"*

And suddenly you realize that when He touched you, your sin did not defile Him, but His holiness made you whole, clean, spotless, white as snow. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8) He can touch you this morning and say those words to you if you will come and kneel before Him, and like the leper recognize that He wills to make you clean. In His humility, this leper didn't dare demand anything, didn't dare to reach out to touch Jesus, he just worshipped Him and stated his belief. Will you do the same?

I want you to consider this leper. He had no example. No one brought him, like those men that brought the paralyzed man through the roof to Jesus. Jesus didn't come to him, like He did to other men. Jesus never said, "Let the lepers come to me and be healed." He just came on his own. He thought, "This man is different. He heals the outcast. He has compassion on all."

⁴Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Why didn't Jesus want anyone to know? Three more times in Matthew Jesus will give the same instructions. Israel was looking for a military leader, someone to lead a revolt against Rome. The nation had a history of charismatic leaders that rallied the people to turn back to God while breaking the enemy's control over them. But Jesus hadn't come to free them from Rome, but to free them from sin and their misperceptions about God. He was trying to teach them that the power of God's love is greater than the force of arms. Cleansed lepers trumpeting their healing would have created an urge in the people to install Jesus as a military king, leading

Commented [notes15]: ¹⁹Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.
Matthew 23:19

Commented [notes16]: ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.
Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)

to the early end of His ministry. Barclay writes, "Jesus enjoined silence upon those he helped lest men should use him to make their own dreams come true instead of waiting on the dream of God." Using the Bible for your own dreams does not benefit the kingdom of God and will not benefit you in the end. Let us be warned.

Jesus sent the cleansed man to the priests for a testimony to them. They needed to know that the power of God was at work. They had studied this cleansing ritual but probably never used it for someone with this type of leprosy. It is a fascinating picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross. It comes from (Leviticus 14). Two birds are taken. One is killed over running water. Cedar, scarlet and hyssop and the live bird are dipped in the blood of the dead bird. The live bird is set free.

What a picture of what Jesus has done for us! Remember the water and blood poured out. (John 19:34) The cedar – is that the wood of the cross, scarlet – does that represent our blood with its inherited sin, and the hyssop, the branch that was dipped in the lamb's blood at Passover and that extended the vinegar to Jesus on the cross. The live but enslaved bird is us, physically alive but enslaved to sin. Then when the blood of the dead one is on all those symbols, we are freed.

The person who was a leper then washes and shaves himself. We must cooperate in cleaning up our lives. A week later he is examined by the priest. Was it just emotion, or has Jesus really touched us? It takes time to see if the change is real. (Matthew 13:5-6) If there is still no leprosy, two male lambs and one female lamb, along with flour and oil is offered. The blood and oil of the sacrifice is placed on his right ear, thumb, and big toe, and he is given a certificate that declares him clean.

The oil represents the Spirit, and the blood the cleansing agent. The right is the first and foremost. It is the primary thing. Our ear represents whom we listen to. Our ear should belong to the Lord first and foremost. Our hands represent our actions. They should first and foremost be for the Lord. Our feet represent where we travel in life. We should move at the direction of the Holy Spirit as people sanctified by His blood. The certificate is the Holy Spirit upon our lives, a deposit guaranteeing our redemption and completion. (Ephesians 1:13-14) What a shock to those priests! What a testimony to them! God is at work in the world.

Would you close your eyes and come with me into the presence of Christ? Has there been leprosy in your spiritual life? Do you recognize that you need the healing touch of Jesus? Are you losing sensitivity? Is sin isolating you, infecting others? Will you come with the leper and with me and kneel in worship before Jesus? Look up into His eyes. Go ahead, tell Him, "If You will, You can make **ME** clean." Now, receive His touch. Hear Him say to you, "I am willing. Be clean." You don't have to tell anyone, your life will tell. Your ear submitted to the Holy Spirit will declare it. Your actions and direction in life, guided by the Spirit, sanctified by the blood of Jesus will be a testimony to them. They will know there is a God that is at work in the world!

Commented [notes17]: ²"These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest:

³The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease,

⁴the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed.

⁵Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot.

⁶He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water.

⁷Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields.

⁸"The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for seven days.

⁹On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair; he must shave his head, his beard, his eyebrows and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean.

¹⁰"On the eighth day he must bring two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old, each without defect, along with three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil.

¹¹The priest who pronounces him clean shall present both the one to be cleansed and his offerings before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

¹²"Then the priest is to take one of the male lambs and offer it as a guilt offering, along with the log of oil; he shall wave them before the LORD as a wave offering.

¹³He is to slaughter the lamb in the holy place where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. Like the sin offering, the guilt offering belongs to the priest; it is most holy.

¹⁴The priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of th... [1]

Commented [notes18]: ³¹Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

John 19:34 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

Matthew 13:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (NIV)

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¹⁰"On the eighth day he must bring two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old, each without defect, along with three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil.

¹¹The priest who pronounces him clean shall present both the one to be cleansed and his offerings before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

¹²"Then the priest is to take one of the male lambs and offer it as a guilt offering, along with the log of oil; he shall wave them before the LORD as a wave offering.

¹³He is to slaughter the lamb in the holy place where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. Like the sin offering, the guilt offering belongs to the priest; it is most holy.

¹⁴The priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

¹⁵The priest shall then take some of the log of oil, pour it in the palm of his own left hand,

¹⁶dip his right forefinger into the oil in his palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of it before the LORD seven times.

¹⁷The priest is to put some of the oil remaining in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering.

¹⁸The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed and make atonement for him before the LORD.

¹⁹"Then the priest is to sacrifice the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. After that, the priest shall slaughter the burnt offering

²⁰and offer it on the altar, together with the grain offering, and make atonement for him, and he will be clean.

²¹"If, however, he is poor and cannot afford these, he must take one male lamb as a guilt offering to be waved to make atonement for him, together with a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, a log of oil,

²²and two doves or two young pigeons, which he can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

²³"On the eighth day he must bring them for his cleansing to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, before the LORD.

²⁴The priest is to take the lamb for the guilt offering, together with the log of oil, and wave them before the LORD as a wave offering.

²⁵He shall slaughter the lamb for the guilt offering and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

²⁶The priest is to pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand,

²⁷and with his right forefinger sprinkle some of the oil from his palm seven times before the LORD.

²⁸Some of the oil in his palm he is to put on the same places he put the blood of the guilt offering-- on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

²⁹The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before the LORD.

³⁰Then he shall sacrifice the doves or the young pigeons, which the person can afford,

³¹one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, together with the grain offering. In this way the priest will make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one to be cleansed."

³²These are the regulations for anyone who has an infectious skin disease and who cannot afford the regular offerings for his cleansing.

Leviticus 14:2-32 (NIV)