

Earlier in this chapter we saw Jesus take the hand of Peter's mother-in-law and raise her up. His touch healed her fever. That evening He healed *all* who came to His door and drove out demons from those who were possessed. In our passage for today we will see Jesus touch another person resulting in two amazing miracles.

⁴⁰ And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Mark 1:40 One Hebrew word described all the skin diseases mentioned in Leviticus 13. The afflicted person in this passage seems to be described as what we would call leprosy. Pastor Guzik describes the progression of the disease. *Leprosy begins as small red spots on the skin. Before too long the spots get bigger and start to turn white, with a shiny or scaly appearance. The spots soon spread over the body and hair begins to fall out—first from the head, then even from the eyebrows. As things get worse, fingernails and toenails become loose; they start to rot and eventually fall off. Then the joints of fingers and toes begin to rot and fall off, piece by piece. Gums begin to shrink and they can't hold the teeth anymore, so each tooth is lost. Leprosy keeps eating away at the face until the nose, the palate, and even the eyes rot—and the leper wastes away until he or she dies.*ⁱ

Disfigurement can also be the result of vermin eating the part of the body that lacks sensation while the affected person sleeps. Dr. Paul Brand was a leading expert on leprosy doing much of his work in India. The first advice he would give new patients is to keep a cat. In our day a combination of antibiotics can cure the patient, but there are still about fifteen million people who suffer from leprosy.

In Jesus' day the law required the leper to live apart from society to prevent contagion, though it is difficult to transmit the disease by mere contact. The leper was required to shout, "Unclean!" if anyone approached them (Leviticus 13:45ⁱⁱ). They lived outside of town in caves relying on the charity of relatives to provide food. While some skin diseases might resolve on their own, leprosy as we know it had never been cured. **Jews believed that only God could cure a leper.** They were the walking dead and were to dress as if they were in mourning. To touch a leper would make one impure and by Biblical law the person was required to go through a process of cleansing to be certain they did not carry the disease. Adding to the public's fear of contamination was the belief that the illness was God's judgment on the afflicted person's sin.

In today's passage the leper approached Jesus. The Luke (5:12ⁱⁱⁱ) account of this event says the man was full of leprosy, meaning the signs of it were all over his body. The common reaction to lepers coming near people would be to move away from them, cursing them, demanding that they leave, and even threatening them. We do not know what Jesus' disciples did, but we can imagine they were trying to protect their Master. I would think their rebukes would have stopped when the leper fell to his knees at the feet of Jesus and began to implore Him for cleansing. *"If you will, you can make me clean!"* The leper means ritually clean which in the Jewish context would mean to be healed and whole. We now know to be healed is to be cleansed of the bacteria that causes the disease. The leper longs to hug his wife and children, to be a part of society again, to be able to go to synagogue and hear God's Word read and expounded.

"If you will, you can make me clean" is an expression of conviction. He believed Jesus had the power to heal though no one ever heard of that kind of leprosy being

healed. This means the man probably understood Jesus to be the Messiah. He most likely heard of Jesus healing all those people who came to Him in Capernaum. He is asking in faith that if Jesus is willing to please cleanse this disease from his body and restore him to wholeness. He most likely had some disfigurement and would not be allowed in the temple even if his leprosy was gone. That means he is asking for both the disease be healed and the disfigurement made whole. That means a recreation of body parts that have decayed and fallen off, such as the nose and extremities.

⁴¹ *Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."* Mark 1:41 Most people only felt disgust when they saw a leper. Not so with Jesus. "Moved with pity," what an expression for us to cling to! Our Maker is moved with compassion on our condition. He sees our fallen state, our emotional pain, our afflictions and is moved. We serve a compassionate God. Hebrews 4:15 tells us, ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* The Greek word we translate as sympathize literally means to suffer with. Jesus suffers with us. That is so much more than our English word conveys. When you are suffering, you can know that Jesus suffers with you. He knows exactly what you are feeling as He feels it with you. We never suffer alone. God told Moses. ⁷ *Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,"* Exodus 3:7 God sees our plight. He hears our cry.

Jesus felt this man's emotional pain from years of isolation. He felt his loathing of his own disfigured body. He felt the rejection he faced whenever he came near others. And we can be sure he knew the physical pain as well.

Dr. Brand wrote about the blessing of pain. Lepers understand the blessing to have feeling in your extremities, to have the warning when there is a cut or an infection. They would give anything to feel again. We think we would love for there to be no pain, but lepers will tell you how dangerous that is. Even emotional pain can be a blessing from God to turn our hearts toward Him. **Emotional pain often comes because we have placed too much of our hope on something passing or in fallen humans.**

In our passage before us Jesus responded by touching the leper. If you heard the previous sermon you know that when the Most Holy touches what is unclean, that thing is sanctified. BOOM! Luke uses Mark's favorite word, "immediately!" That touch, like the touch that raised Peter's mother-in-law made everything that was not as God intended whole. The bacteria were gone. He just said, "I will; be clean!" Instantaneous. The leper did not defile Jesus for he was no longer unclean. At the point of contact he was whole.

There is a painting in the church at Magdala in Israel of the woman with the issue of blood touching Jesus' tzitzit. Between her finger and His garment is a spark, like matter touching antimatter. (picture) Which is overpowering the other, her uncleanness or His holiness? You know the answer for that woman, the leper, and for us.

But there is more in this touch. It is human touch he had longed for, probably for years. There is something about human touch that communicates care. Hughes described the scene, *"See Jesus bent over the prostrate leper, his holy hand resting on the decaying flesh of the foul-smelling leper, and you see what he did for him. What has he done for us?"*^{iv} I am so glad we are a hugging church. It reminds of when a man named Bear who was an alcoholic and lived in the woods and one day came to church. He had quite an odor. My wife hugged him. Probably the first hug he had received in a long time. He

eventually cleaned himself up as he prepared to die from cirrhosis of the liver. But he died with the hope of heaven. What a difference touch makes. The touch of Jesus is the ultimate touch.

⁴² *And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.* Mark 1:42

Immediately! Instantaneously! POOF! The bacteria is no more and the scars are gone and the deformities are whole. The man's putrid skin is like that of a baby. Can you see him staring at his healed body, checking all the parts that had been so damaged now perfectly clean. But I imagine the next scene to be the real tearjerker, He looks into Jesus' eyes and realizes He is looking into the eyes of his Maker (Song of Songs 1:15^v). He sees acceptance, a sight he has not seen for years, but it means so much more because of who is accepting him. What grace (John 1:14^{vi})! What love! What compassion! Did he think over his past sins and wonder how Jesus could still be willing to heal him? Or perhaps that is something that came later, on his way to the priest.

Two miracles had taken place, healing and acceptance. The Scripture does not mention the acceptance, but I have no doubt that after such a miracle the man placed his faith in Jesus. I would guess that he already had before he made the daring move to approach Him. Falling on one's knees was an act of worship. The Greek word for worship is the same expression, to fall on one's knees. Which miracle was greater, healing and wholeness or acceptance? The healing only took a touch from the Creator. Acceptance was only possible through Jesus' painful death with our sins upon Him (Matthew 20:28^{vii}). That is the greatest miracle. We are in the season of celebrating Jesus' birth, but He was born to eventually die for our sins that we might be accepted by God.

Many of us have an affliction of varying degrees of suffering. You can come to the elders and ask for prayer and if it is the Lord's will and we have faith you will be healed of the physical problem. I have seen it happen. No one can tell me God does not heal today. He would not have given us those instructions in the book of James if it were only for that age (James 5:14,15^{viii}). I have also prayed for people with severe afflictions for years and witnessed the grace of God help them endure. God's ways are perfect even when we do not understand them. The greater miracle is God's will, your salvation!

⁴³ *And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once,* ⁴⁴ *and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them."* Mark 1:43,44 Jesus knew the powers of the world would try to squash any messianic movement. People in power guard their power carefully and can be ruthless in doing so. Jesus still had a few more years of ministry, teaching His disciples and fulfilling the prophecies. If His fame spread too quickly, it would hinder His freedom to move about as we see in the following verses. Jesus charged the man sternly, because He knew what a temptation it would be to tell others. If you had an instant transformation like that, you would have a hard time not telling anyone of the wonder that you experienced. Is that how you feel about your salvation? It is how we should feel when we realize what Jesus did for us.

The priests had never seen such a transformation. It would be a testimony to them that the messiah had come. The prescription for the priest to declare a person clean is found in Leviticus 14. It instructs the priest what to do and tells the healed person the offerings that are required. There is a waiting period, probably to be sure that is not coming back, and a final offering. The law even provides a less expensive offering if the person is poor. Then the priest declares the person clean, and the person can resume

normal life. The ritual appears to me to be a picture of dying to our old life and rising to a new one. It seems to be a foreshadow of new life found in Jesus. We all were once in a spiritually leprous condition of rebellion toward God. We were spiritually disfigured. It is a much more serious condition than leprosy, because it disfigures our eternal soul. We must not feel our hearts hardening and becoming insensitive. Sin like rats eat away at our souls that have lost sensitivity toward God.

At that point we only have two options. We can place our faith in the only One who can make us whole. We have seen others changed. We know Jesus can do it. Are you willing to fall on your knees before your Maker and say with the leper, *"If You will, You can make me clean?"* If you do with a sincere and believing heart I guarantee you that Jesus will reach out and touch your sin blackened soul and you will hear the same response, *"I will; be clean."* God has declared in His Word that He is willing (Mark 10:45^{ix}; 2 Peter 3:9^x). In fact, Jesus came and offered Himself for this very purpose, to cleanse our sin sick souls. We should instead pray, "Since You are willing, wash me clean of my sin." The most holy touches the leprous soul and we are made clean and whole. BOOM! It is instantaneous. Immediately! White as snow (Isaiah 1:18^{xi}). Of course, we must live it out and adapt to this new life (Philippians 2:12^{xii}). But from that point forward everything is different. Our desires conform to His good desires. We are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xiii}). Selfishness dies away and a compassionate heart takes its place, one like the heart of Jesus (Ezekiel 11:19^{xiv})!

Go and show yourself to the priest and bring an offering of thanks. Yes, go tell a mature believer so they can disciple you and help you learn how to live this new life. You bury your old nature with Jesus in baptism and as the offering in Leviticus suggests, you spread your wings and learn to fly in this new life, riding on the wind of the Spirit (Isaiah 40:31^{xv}).

But there is a major difference between what Jesus told the former leper and what He tells us. The man was to tell no one. We are to tell everyone! As the end of this Gospel declares, Mark 16:15 ¹⁵ *And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."* Every sin afflicted person needs to know there is a God who heals and makes whole! The sin like bacteria is gone! The deformity of our soul is made whole with godly desires!

⁴⁵ *But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.* Mark 1:45 However, the man who was once leprous could not keep quiet. He started telling everyone, and that made it difficult for Jesus to go through cities. Crowds would press in on Him requesting He hear their need. Jesus had to avoid towns to keep from being mobbed by requests. This is what you would expect if someone could truly heal any disease and deliver people from demonic oppression, especially in that day when medicine was so crude.

My wife and I were tour guides for Japanese before I was called to ministry. They would come to Sedona wanting to see vortexes. We always told them that if the vortexes actually healed people, what kind of a massive line would there be around each one as people waited to be healed. That usually was enough to convince them that there was really no healing power there. We would ask them on the way to the vortex if they felt anything. They would say they did not. Finally, when we got to the vortex spot we would ask again, and they would say that they did not. Then we would tell them we had arrived.

When the power of suggestion was not present, they were honest with their experience. Most of time they lost their faith in vortexes, and that gave us former lepers an opening to tell them about the healer of our souls.

As we read this passage, we see what we would expect if someone could heal everyone who came to Him. The crowds that would meet Him with needs would be overwhelming. That is why He stayed out in the wilderness. Only those who truly believed would make the journey out to meet Him and be touched or touch Him. And they did come, from every quarter. That is why John wrote, ³⁰ *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;* John 20:30

He still invites us to come to Him. Jesus said, ²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰ *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* Matthew 11:28-30 And later in this same Gospel we will see people desperate to touch Him because they had faith that when they did they would be healed. ⁵⁶ *And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.* Mark 6:56 They implored Jesus to come near that they might touch Him and be made well. If you have not already done so, I ask you to touch Him this morning. The Scriptures tell us that He is near to each one of us (Acts 17:27^{xvi}). The psalmist tells us ¹⁸ *The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.* Psalm 145:18 It does not matter how diseased and disfigured your soul is. The touch of Jesus is all it takes for you to be made new.

For those of us who long ago felt the touch of Jesus or reached out to touch Him and were made whole I want to ask, do you need a fresh touch? Has your compassion faded? Are your desires being pulled back into the things of this world? Have you fallen into a routine that has become dry and lifeless? You can get that fresh touch if you will come to Him. He wants us to walk and talk with Him like He did with the first couple in the Garden (Genesis 3:8^{xvii}). Jesus is here this morning waiting for you to reach out and in faith and touch Him. As with the woman with the issue of blood, power will flow out from Him (Luke 8:46^{xviii}). Let us take a moment to pray and either touch Him for that cleansing of your sins or for a renewal of your passion to live in His presence.

Now for those of you who touch Him for the first time, go and tell one of the elders of the church so they can pray with you and help guide you into your new life. For those who touched Him to be renewed and restore that daily walk with Him, tell your spouse or a believing friend so they can encourage you and help keep you accountable.

Questions:

- 1 What was the Jewish belief regarding leprosy?
- 2 How did the leper express his faith?
- 3 What is his double request?
- 4 What was Jesus' response and how should that encourage us?
- 5 What is the blessing of pain?
- 6 What two miracles happened to the leper?
- 7 What does the ritual for restoration point to?
- 8 What is the spiritual parallel to leprosy?
- 9 What was the result of the leper's disobedience?

10 Will you reach out and touch Him?

ⁱ David Guzik, *Mark*, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Mk 1:40.

ⁱⁱ **Leviticus 13:45 (ESV)**

⁴⁵ "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.'

ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 5:12 (ESV)** While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."ⁱⁱⁱ

^{iv} R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 59.

^v **Song of Songs 1:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.

^{vi} **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{vii} **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

^{viii} **James 5:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

^{ix} **Mark 10:45 (ESV)**

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

^x **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

^{xi} **Isaiah 1:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

^{xii} **Philippians 2:12 (ESV)**

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

^{xiii} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xiv} **Ezekiel 11:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

^{xv} **Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)**

³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

^{xvi} **Acts 17:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

^{xvii} **Genesis 3:8 (ESV)**

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

^{xviii} **Luke 8:46 (ESV)**

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me."