

Luke: The Doctor Will See You Now!

From Untouchable to Embraced

Luke 5:12–16

Introduction

Have you ever felt untouchable? Not in the sense of being invincible, but the opposite—too broken, too stained, too unworthy to be embraced? Most of us carry something like that. For some, it's the weight of a past mistake. For others, it's a private struggle no one else sees. And in those moments, we wonder, *“Does God really want anything to do with me?”*

The Bible gives us examples that can apply to those inner monologues and dialogues that we have with ourselves. Typically, it uses some sort of physical health issue that happens to occur within a context of ancient Judaism. Someone would come down with blindness or lameness or, as is the case in our text, a skin disease. And people treat those afflicted as if they earned the affliction. They would be kicked out. Sent to the margins. We can certainly easily imagine the mental anguish that would follow this physical problem.

We can see how Jesus interacts with people who are or feel unworthy. The Bible speaks to our inner struggles with self-worth when it reveals how Jesus deals with all of those feelings in a public way. We find several accounts of people who did not just feel unworthy or untouchable, their health issues forced them to be separated from the rest of society. They were literally untouchable according to their laws.

That's the situation of the man we meet in Luke 5. He's a leper. In the ancient world, which was about as untouchable as you could get. Leprosy wasn't just a physical disease—it carried social and spiritual consequences. Lepers were outcasts, separated from family and community, excluded from worship. They had to live “outside the camp,” constantly reminding others of their unclean status. It was a life defined by shame and isolation.

But then Jesus came to town. And in restoring this physically untouchable outcast, we see how Jesus can reach to and restore each one of us, regardless of how private our struggle is. I invite you to this life-giving story of healing and restoration in Luke 5:12-16. (read text)

1. Jesus Sees Past the Shame That Separates (v. 12)

Luke tells us the man was “full of leprosy.” That means his disease was advanced—no hiding it, no pretending otherwise. Leprosy and other skin diseases were impossible to hide. It could be concealed, perhaps, covered up. But once it advanced, it covered the man. His flesh was deteriorating.

Luke uses the term *lepra*. It refers to a wide array of skin diseases. The man would have been covered with lesions and had swollen areas on his skin. It probably had attacked his nervous system. In the Ancient Near East, if you had ringworm, lupus or even the heartbreak of psoriasis, you were treated as being leprous.

We take advantage of the privacy we experience in our culture. It is considered impolite and inappropriate to discuss the health issues of others. In fact, it is illegal in our country for health care professionals to disclose if a person has Hansen’s disease (leprosy) today.

But in Luke 5, it is a different story. Once he was diagnosed according to Lev. 13-14, this man was then forced to announce his diagnosis and condition. He would have to shout, “Unclean! Unclean!” everywhere he went. When Jesus attends to the leper here, it reveals how Jesus responds to the outcasts and the marginalized.

There may be no actual physical problem with you. No difficult disease has been diagnosed. But if you are honest, you walk around feeling isolated and alone. And you have done that yourself. You have forced yourself away from those who love and care about you because of how you feel about yourself. If you feel this way, that your baggage, your mistakes, have forced you into some sort of isolated existence, allow this leper’s story to be yours, too.

He was marked by leprosy. He was marked by shame.

Yet Jesus doesn't look away. He looks upon the one the rest of them ignored. And he sees the man. Jesus understands the disease is present, but he does not apply the same stigma to the man.

We live in a world that often defines people by their failures or weaknesses. "She's divorced." "He's an addict." "They're a failure." We even start to define ourselves by our shame: *I'm not enough. I don't belong. I'll never change.*

But when Jesus looks at us, He sees past the shame that separates. He sees us as God intended us to be—His image bearers, precious and redeemable.

I remember as a kid, after my parents divorce, one of the ministers at her church telling her that there was no place for a divorced woman in the church of God. I don't remember exactly what I said to her after I overheard that, but even then I remember thinking "I guess we don't belong." It felt like a part of church experience was limited or closed off to our family – like there was a nicer, more fun, prettier part of the church that only right, whole families go to go hobnob in.

But a few years later, I would realize that Jesus was much more important than some nabob who was stuck in some unbiblical notion about graceless religion. God uses this moment to challenge me to see other as He sees them.

Jesus sees past the shame that separates.

2. Jesus Responds to the Faith That Risks (v. 12)

The leper does something incredibly risky. He breaks every social rule, pushes past the crowd, and falls at Jesus' feet. By law, he should have kept his distance. By custom, he should have stayed silent. But desperation moves him to faith.

He says, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." Notice the faith—he doesn't doubt Jesus' power. He only wonders if Jesus is willing.

Faith always involves risk. It risks rejection. It risks stepping into the unknown. It risks believing when everything in us says not to.

And yet, faith is what Jesus responds to. He always honors the step toward Him, even if it's shaky.

The Call to West Virginia. Moving a day away from our family, leaving behind a network of pastors and friends, which was a risky proposition. We were determined to obey a difficult calling and trust God when the outcome wasn't guaranteed.

Because Jesus responds to faith that risks.

3. Jesus Offers a Grace That Embraces (vv. 13–16)

What happens next is shocking. Jesus stretches out His hand and touches the leper. He didn't have to touch him—He could have healed with a word. But He touches him to say, "You are not untouchable to me."

To a leper, who has been isolated, alone, not making any physical contact whatsoever, can you imagine this method of healing? What does it mean to the leper? If you have not been touched, even by your family – wife? Children? Parents? – no hugs, no handshakes, not even a shove out of the way. No physical contact. And now, Jesus places a compassionate hand on him. What a powerful way to communicate to others in the crowd who had seen Jesus heal others.

We can assume even the disciples steered clear from the leper because that is what they have been trained, taught, conditioned to do. And Jesus not only does not avoid the man, but he also reaches out to initiate contact! The disciples saw that. It registered. Jesus absolutely could have spoken healing. His words could have cleansed that man. He would heal others by word alone. But here, he reaches out and touches him as he expresses willingness to heal the man.

There is grace, perfect love, in that touch. In this way, we see the grace of God embrace that leper and bring healing, restoration, and hope back to his life.

Immediately, the man is cleansed. His disease is gone. But even more, his shame is gone. He can re-enter the community. He can worship again. He's restored.

The man is going to re-enter a community whose leadership will prove to be opposed to the one who made his re-entry possible. Imagine that man as he presented himself again, whole, cleansed, restored to the gatekeepers of the synagogue. They knew who he was. They've been avoiding him for years, most likely. And now? Here he is. Presenting himself.

It is likely that some of the same people who he presented himself to at the beginning of his diagnosis are now here looking again and this same man. Clean. No deteriorating flesh. No swelling. Everything is clean and in place. They had to wonder what happened to him. Well, the man had been exposed to the life changing, shame erasing, future restoring love, and power of Jesus.

That's grace. Grace not only heals but embraces. Grace not only forgives but welcomes us back into fellowship with God and His people.

And here's the truth: this leper's story is our story. Our sin and shame had us living "outside the camp." But Jesus crossed the distance. He touched our lives through the cross. And He made us new.

Conclusion

The good news of Luke 5 is this: *When Jesus speaks, everything listens.* Even shame. Even sin. Even death.

This man's story is our story. And the same invitation is open to you: bring your shame, bring your need, bring your faith—even if it feels risky. Because Jesus offers a grace that doesn't just heal from a distance but embraces you fully.

So, here's the question as we close: If Jesus sees past your shame, responds to your faith, and offers you His grace—will you let Him embrace you?

Because when Jesus speaks, everything listens. Let's be the first to say, "Yes, Lord."