

Jesus and the Leper

Mark 1:40-45

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, March 3, 2024

Good morning, everyone. If you would, let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer together.

Heavenly Father, we're coming to the time when we open up the Word of God, and we study the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are going to talk about His mercy. And as we do that, Father, we just have to come with a broken heart and say, where would we be without Your mercy? This world is headed for hell, and we would all be going with it if it were not for Your compassion and Your kindness. You have drawn us out of this crazy place. You have saved us, washed us off, all because of Your grace in our lives.

And so Father, as we study Christ, and what He did for a leper, would we just walk out of this place with an overwhelming love for You and appreciation for the salvation that has come from the kindness of God? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, this morning, we are continuing a series that we started earlier this year on the gospel of Mark. So if you would, please take your Bibles and turn there with me. That's the book we're in today. For the seventh time in a row, open your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark, which is one of the most memorable Gospels in my opinion, I think because it's so straightforward. And what I mean is that, instead of starting off by saying "In the beginning was the word" or something like that, Mark just starts telling you stories about Jesus. I mean, he just jumps into the deep end, pedal to the metal and doesn't let up until the end of the book. And he tells you today about the time the Lord healed a leper.

And just to introduce that to you, as some of you know, I'm a history buff, I enjoy learning from people from the past. And one of my favorite men to study as it relates especially to the history of Israel is a guy by the name of Baldwin the Fourth. He was the King of Jerusalem during the time of the Crusades, which means he ruled over that city when it was surrounded on all sides by enemies. The Crusaders never conquered the holy land as a whole. All they did was take over some key areas, and even so, Baldwin held on to them. Despite the fact that he was young, he fought most of his battles as a teenager, and despite the fact that he was a leper. It's why he wore an iron mask when he went out in public to hide all the swelling and scars and horrors on his face. And he also had to be carried to and from the battlefield because he was too weak to walk. All of his toes had rotted off his feet. And he was visited by friends on a regular basis who brought him food and water even though it cost some of them their lives because it gave them leprosy too, or it made them very sick.

It makes you wonder why? Why on earth would anyone be that kind to him? And I believe the answer is found in one word that Adam read in our passage earlier, and it's the word compassion. You see that

word there in the story. Mark 1:41, says, “Moved with compassion. Jesus reached out and touched a leper.” In other words, He didn't do this because the man deserved it. And He didn't touch him because he was worthy. It happened because Christ was compelled by mercy. That's all. That's why Baldwin's friends treated him that way. It's important to remember because this morning we're coming to the seventh sermon in the Gospel of Mark that we've done. And the book is all about Christ and the fact that He came to save sinners. But it continues with a story like this one to show you the Salvation Christ brings us is based on one thing, and that is grace. You are saved by the mercy of God. You're not saved because you earn it. A leper couldn't do that at this time. And it doesn't take place because you're worthy either. You're forgiven when you fall down on your knees and beg Him just like this guy did. And the truth is, friends, you can be a leper, and God will forgive you. Do you know that? And you can be someone who was unclean and dirty and filthy in everyone's eyes, and He will show you kindness if you learn how to call out to Him. It all goes back to that. God gives grace to the humble and He lowers the proud.

And I mention that because by most accounts, we live in a city that's full of lepers right now, don't we, spiritually speaking? I mean on the one hand, Chilliwack is still a religious town. On the other hand, it's getting pretty rough around here. Anybody go outside the doors this week? And many of the rough people are losing interest in the things of God because they're gay. And they think God has abandoned them and doesn't care about them anymore because they're hooked on drugs or something like that. That's not true. God has not abandoned the people of this town because He is still a God of mercy. It means even if you're gay or not, He has made a way for you to be saved if you will come to the Lord Jesus Christ and repent. It's a powerful message, isn't it? It should be life changing for people, but it's not because unfortunately, some of us never tell them that anymore because we don't believe it.

Out of curiosity, how many of you shared the gospel with a gay person this week? And how many of us have told them they can go to heaven because God has made a way through Christ? It's not too many. Because if we're honest about it, a lot of us think this is a waste of time because they're lepers, and they don't deserve it. We think they're unclean and unworthy of His love. But that's dumb.

What were you like when God saved you? You were unclean. What was going on in your heart before conversion? I mean, you were a leper, you were dirty, you were filthy. And what did God do? He washed you, He sanctified you, He made you clean through His blood, which means He can do that for them. God is able to save to the uttermost of those who draw near to Him.

You say, “Well, it's not that simple, Pastor Jeremy.” Yes, it is. And you might be telling yourself, “I don't know if Jesus actually said that.” Yeah, He did. You see it right here in the story. See, in this passage, Jesus told the Jews who were the cleanest people on the planet, that a leper could be saved right alongside the rest of them. And if He said that to them, how much more would He say that to you and me? Friends, you're not better than a leper this morning. Don't ever get into the idea that somehow,

you're closer to God because you deserve it. Your salvation is found the same way everyone else's is and that's by Christ alone.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at four ways that Jesus showed compassion to a leper. So, if you're taking notes, this is our outline for today. And in Mark 1, starting in verse 40, through 45, we're gonna see four ways He shows compassion to a leper. And if this story doesn't break your heart, I didn't preach it the right way. This is one of the most mind-blowing stories, I think, in this gospel. Let's look at it together.

The first one is by letting the leper approach Him. The first way Christ shows compassion to this man is by letting the leper approach Him, which means He doesn't turn him away like everyone else would have done. He welcomed him in when the guy came close.

As you come to verse 40, let me just remind you, like I just said earlier, Mark is the most straightforward gospel. Because even though you're coming to the end of chapter one, you've already seen Jesus do so many things in such a short amount of time. I mean, for example, verse 21 says He went into a synagogue in Capernaum and healed a demon possessed man, remember that? Just cast the demon out of the guy. And then down in verse 31 it says He healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law in the same kind of fashion because He took the fever out of her. Then in verse 33, He does the same thing for the town of Capernaum because the whole city gathers at His door, and He cures them too. Are you feeling the pace of this, the speed of Mark? Then in verse 39, it says, "And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons, that means the miracles just didn't stop. Jesus did this sort of thing everywhere. It's an ongoing thing for Him, which explains what happens in verse 40 now, when it says that a leper came to Him, Why? Because He saw Jesus healing people. What brought this guy to Christ? Well, he had heard what He was doing for others, and he said, "Maybe He can cure me." So he goes to Him.

In fact, if you want to write this verse down in Luke 5:12 actually tells us that the man came to Jesus when He was in one of the cities, presumably of Galilee. And we don't know which city that he came to, but the ancient historian Josephus says that there were about 240 towns in the province of Galilee at this time. And the population of each of them varied from a few hundred to several thousand people, which is where this guy found Jesus. Because the idea is that as Christ is traveling around from place-to-place preaching and healing people, the leper spotted Him and came to Him. Which shows you how desperate he was because he wasn't supposed to do that. That was strictly forbidden at this time for a leper to enter the vicinity of a town.

And I need to stop here and say a few words about this because leprosy is a disease that many of us are not familiar with. We know about all kinds of sicknesses and illnesses here in the modern world, but this is one a lot of us have never encountered. But it's caused by a bacteria called mycobacterium leprae that spread through things like personal contact. And so that once it enters a person's body, it attacks several

things, but one of them is the nervous system by creating a sedative that makes the victim numb to pain. I told you before there's a lot of talk in this world about living a pain free life in Canada. You ever heard that before? Lepers lived a pain free life, and it was not a good thing because the way it worked is if you contracted leprosy, you'd begin to scratch your ear until you rubbed the skin right off because you couldn't feel it. You had no idea you were rubbing that hard. Or you would grab hold of a hot iron and burn your hands to the bone. Or in poorer parts of the world, like Galilee, you would sleep on the floor, and the rats would nibble at your fingers and toes and eat them off and you would have no idea. The sensation of that had completely disappeared from you. And I'm not saying that to be gross. I just want to give you a picture of what this disease was like; it was terrible.

Chances are you've never met anyone as ugly as a leper. They had black and deformed spots on their body, along with foul smelling boils. They had nubs where their fingers were supposed to be and stubs on their toes. Some of them were missing lips. Some of them were missing eyelids. Some of them were missing arms and legs and ears. Listen to what one Bible Commentary said about this. It said, "Leprosy begins with an unaccountable lethargy and pain in the joints. Then there appears on the body especially on the back symmetrical, discolored patches. On them, little nodules form at first pink and then turning brown. The skin is thickened. The nodules gather specially in the folds of the cheek, nose, lips and forehead. The whole appearance of the face has changed until the man looks less human and more like the ancients said, a lion. The nodules grow larger and larger until they become ulcers and issue a foul-smelling discharge. The eyebrows fall out, the hair falls out, the eyes become glossed over, the muscles waste away, the hands become claw like. There's disfigurement around the fingernails even if they have any fingernails left, and the voice becomes harsh as the person has swelling around the vocal cords. Eventually the sufferer becomes one big mass of ulcers because the boils never stop growing until the time of death, which is anywhere from 10 to 20 years after contracting the disease, all of which is made worse by the fact that they had no cure for it in the first century."

Which is why the Old Testament laid out steps in the Book of Leviticus to tell you how to avoid the disease. Whenever someone was suspected of having it, they had to first be examined by a priest. And then if the condition looked bad, they had to be isolated for seven days, after which time they were reexamined again. And if it was worsening, they had to be isolated for another seven days. After which time they're reexamined again. And if the condition was continuing to deteriorate, the priests would pronounce them unclean. And that word was like a death sentence because it meant that they had to leave the people of Israel. They had to tear their clothes, go around with their hair uncovered, and everywhere they went they had to say *ṭāmē, ṭāmē*, unclean, unclean, and live life completely alone. You couldn't go to the temple if you had leprosy. You couldn't go to the synagogue. You couldn't visit your friends and family. Your wife had to leave you. Your kids had to leave you, brothers, sisters. You just had to disappear, making you something like a walking corpse.

Even today, if you would visit some third world countries where leprosy is still around, you'll find people in places called leper colonies where they have to live away from all society and fend for themselves. And that's what this guy is doing in Mark chapter one.

I just gave you all that background because this is what you're seeing when you see the word leper in verse 40. This man is living alone, he's fending for himself. He's like a walking corpse to the Jews until he shows up here and barges into town. He just walks right in and bursts on the scene. And as you hear that, what do you think the people were thinking? They would have been shocked. What are you doing? What would they have done? If you were a Jew in this town at this time, what was the reaction? Well, they would have run. The rabbi said you had to stay six feet from a leper at all times. And if the wind was blowing, you had to stay 150 feet away. And if they didn't run, they would have gotten violent. I mean, the Talmud even said if a leper comes into town, you stone him. That's the solution. They were perfectly within their rights to kill this guy.

And even so, if you look in the verse, it doesn't stop him. Mark says he just keeps going until he gets to Jesus. Even amidst the threats, the angry looks, the propensity maybe for violence, the guy just keeps heading to the Saviour until he comes into His presence and look at what he does.

It says he beseeched Him. It means he begged. He didn't come to Christ demanding anything. He shows up with empty hands and he fell on his knees. It means he approached Him in a posture of reverence, like you would do to the Lord. That's who he thought Jesus was; he's coming to the Master. And he said, "If you're willing, you can make me clean." Not if You're able. Apparently, he didn't doubt that. Not if You're strong enough, Jesus. Not if You're powerful. Only if You want to. Nobody wanted to help a leper. God didn't want to help a leper in this guy's mind, maybe. But if You want to Lord, and as we're going to find out in a minute, Christ does want to because He says, "I'm willing be cleansed." Because there's no one, and I mean, no one, and I mean, no one Jesus is not willing to save if they come to Him like this.

What does it take to be saved? You fall on your knees? What do you have to do to get to God, you beg. You come with empty hands. That's what this guy did, so the Lord healed him. This leper is in a bad place, and I don't have to tell you that. He lost everything when he got this disease. Health gone, home gone, friends gone, job gone, relationships gone, community, respect, future, all of that vanished in the blink of an eye. What does he have left now? Christ. That's what he has left. What's there to look forward to in his life? It's Jesus. And Jesus says even so that's enough for him.

If you remember the context for this, Mark is writing this gospel to tell you how Jesus saves sinners. And as He does, Jesus is not turning to all the fine, outstanding respectable Jews here. Because a lot of them wouldn't beg. Jews were too proud for that sort of thing. They were too arrogant to fall down on their knees. So he goes to the leper because he would.

Friends, are you too proud to beg God this morning? If you are, God won't save you. He won't have anything to do with you. But if you're humble enough to do it, He will. I think we need to remember this because we all have a tendency to think like the Jews and say the gospel is not this simple. In order for Christ to save this man, he's got to get rid of his leprosy. And in order for God to help him, he's got to change and keep the law and go back to the synagogue and be a good, honest person. And then maybe then if he's lucky, he can go to God. Christ doesn't say that. You don't read that anywhere in here. He says, "I'm going to forgive him now because he came to Me." There's only one thing you have to do to be right with God and that is to go to Jesus. You don't go to the law first. He turned to Him.

By the way, this is not the only time in the Bible, you're going to see someone heal a leper or see Jesus heal one. In Luke 17, it says He healed ten people of leprosy, remember that story? And He told them to go and show themselves to the priests and only one of them came back. Then Matthew 26 tells us about a man named Simon the leper whom Jesus presumably healed, which is why he invited Him into his house. In Matthew 11, it tells us that Jesus helped the blind to see, and the lame to walk, and the lepers to be cleansed because He does this over and over again. And every time, the motive is the same, He heals them because they're broken. Christ always treats these people this way.

Which brings you to another way Jesus shows compassion to this leper, and that's by touching him. Friends, I gotta tell you, I've been studying the story all week. In fact, I talked about it so much, my boys told me, "Please stop talking to us, dad, about lepers. We got it, bad stuff. Got it, dad, move on." But the reason I can't get over this is because the story in the mind of a Jew just keeps getting weirder. Because now, He touches him.

And just let your mind think about that for a minute. It's been ages since anyone touched this guy. It might have been years, depending on how long he was sick, which would have made him feel like an animal. When human beings don't touch you and get close, you feel like a dog. So before Christ ever cures him of this disease, He does this to make him feel human again. What a Saviour, amen? What a God. You couldn't make this up in the first century. Why do people say that the stories in the Bible were just created by men; no man would have ever written this. You don't touch lepers ever. Christ did.

And as I say that, you know, you got to keep in mind this setting here. By the time you get to verse 41, there's three characters in this story, right? Get your mind around the characters. There's Christ, the leper, and the people in the town. There's the Lord. There's the sick man on his knees before Him. And there's the citizens of the city looking on to see what Christ will do.

And His reaction comes in several stages.

Verse 41 says he's moved with compassion. That's a strong term that implies that He's provoked. It hurt His stomach to see the guy like this. We all know what this is like. We've all loved someone so much, that when they suffer, it's like a kick in the gut. Right? And you just want to lurch toward them. That's

what the word means. That's why Mark says He stretches out His hand. He doesn't pull it back like so many other people did and run away when He sees the leper. He goes forward and touches him. And that could be translated that He grabbed him. Some commentators say the word is such a powerful word that He might have put His arm around him, full of boils and spots and ulcers on his body. He embraced this guy with the swelling and the smells and the scars and nubs where his fingers were supposed to be, and stubs instead of toes, missing his lips, missing his eyelids, looking like a monster because He wanted to identify with him. The reason Jesus did this is He just want to show the guy that He cared. He didn't have to touch him. Jesus healed lots of people without ever touching them. You can read about them in the rest of Mark chapter one. He did this to express His love for this man.

Just so you know, there's a lot of debate as to how Christ did this because it looks like He's breaking the law. The Old Testament said you are not supposed to touch a leper, that type of thing is forbidden. If you did, the uncleanness was transferred over to you temporarily in a sense. But not for Jesus; He's never unclean. In fact, if you notice, when He touches this man, the man's uncleanness is not given to Christ. Christ cleanness is given to the leper. He says, "I'm willing, be cleansed." It means "I'm willing, and I'll take your dirt away. I'm willing, and I will remove the defilement. I'm willing, and I'm going to make you whole again, because I will impute My perfect righteousness to your account."

And again, as you read this, you've really got to wonder what were the Jews thinking now. They would have passed out. And what would they have done? They would have looked at this and said, "This is insane. What's He doing? Not only is He talking to the leper, He's touching him. And not only is He touching him, He's holding on to him." They didn't have a category for this. But Jesus does it because He asked the question, "Which one's more important, helping this man or leaving him in that wretched state?" And I think the answer is obvious. And which one pleases God? I think if Christ were with us today, He would ask the same thing to our church, which one's more important, helping people like this or ignoring them so you can stay in a Christian bubble where everything's nice and clean? Listen, God doesn't want us to be so caught up in our own little Christian lives we become immune to the suffering of others. He wants us to go out and give mercy to them. That's what our Saviour did.

The reason I want to make a big deal of that point is because remember that Jesus is doing this in front of Jews who hardly ever showed mercy to people like this. It's not even on the radar. If you were to ask them, the Jews, "Are you saved?" They would have said, "Yeah, cuz I stay away from people like that." If you want to know why are you going to heaven, they would say, "Because I avoid lepers, and my parents avoid lepers, and my grandparents avoid lepers. We are a leper free society. That's how I know God will accept me." The Lord turns that on its head. He said it takes more than that to be pleasing to God. Yes, you need to obey the commandments and stay away like you're supposed to. But on the other hand, there's gotta be some kindness here toward them.

Hosea 6, writing to the Jews says, "God desires mercy and not sacrifice." And what that means is that God doesn't care about all the laws you keep on the outside if your heart is cold toward people on the

inside; that needs to change before anything else. If you're wondering what that looks like for us, practically speaking, it just means if you work at a desk job, learn how to show mercy to people at the desk job. Start there. Be compassionate instead of being so hard and crusty all the time. If you're a stay-at-home mom, do the same thing for other stay at home moms. Pick up the phone, call them, see how they're doing, reach out and pray for them. Do you go to school? Be merciful towards those in school. If you run a business and you have customers, show gentleness there. But you have to make this a priority because that's what it means to follow Christ.

You know, I looked it up this week, and I found there have been some cases of leprosy in the nation of Canada, believe it or not. And one of the first ones occurred in the 19th century when a group of immigrants came into the province of New Brunswick with it as they stepped off the boat. And when it was spotted, the government did several things, but eventually it led to them creating a hospital for them, where several Christian doctors and nurses worked. There were other people involved in that as well, but some of them were believers. And when they were asked why they did this for the lepers, they said it was because of Jesus. He showed mercy to me, and I need to show mercy to others. That needs to be the mentality of our church, any church.

And it brings you to another way that Christ shows compassion for this guy, and that's by healing him. Just moving along in the text here, a third way He shows compassion for the leper is by healing him.

It's important because everything's been building up to this. This is why the guy came to Jesus. He's not walking into the town and risking his life and putting his neck on the line for nothing. He wants to be cured. The guy wants his leprosy taken away. That's why he's at the feet of the Saviour. So verse 42 tells you how this happens. It says "immediately." That means instantly with no gimmicks involved, no messing around, the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. Which means as Jesus is holding on to this guy, the sickness went away. And as He's grabbing him, or He has His arm around him, or whatever this word implies, the scars on his face vanished. And the ulcers on his body disappeared. And the smell went away. And the swelling went away, and the hair grew back on his head. The discolored patches of skin were replaced with new skin. The lips that were rotting off were changed and replaced with new lips. The eyebrows that had fallen off were recreated right there in front of everyone's face. The fingers, toes, arms, legs, all the parts of the body that were ravaged by this disease were fixed in an instant because in short, the guy got his life back again. He would have looked like a completely different person. They wouldn't have recognized him because Jesus' miracles are not done partially; they're done perfectly. And that's what you see right here. There's no time of rehab. He doesn't have to go see a doctor and work on the leprosy and try to get it out of the system like we often have to do, none of that. He's just instantly cured.

Which makes the next part of the passage seems strange because it says, "Jesus sternly warned the man and immediately sent him away and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded as a testimony to them.'"

Now, I don't know about you, but I've read this story many, many times before and every time I get to this part of it, it always makes me scratch my head. Because I read it and say, "What?" No saying anything to anyone. Really, Jesus? The guy just got healed. What do you think the first thing he's going to do is? Go tell everybody! Go show yourself to a priest. Why? I don't want to talk to a priest. I want to talk to my mom and dad, or talk to my wife, talk to my friends; I haven't seen them in ages.

What's going on here? It's like the Lord is putting a gag order on the guy. Well, the reason He does this is because He wants him to keep the law. The Book of Leviticus said if you were healed of leprosy, you had to appear before a priest so he could confirm it. You couldn't just go around Israel saying, "I got healed of leprosy." There's more to it than that. So just like the priests had to pronounce you unclean when you got leprosy, he had to pronounce you clean when you were cured, so he could bring you back into the fold of Israel. And that's what the Lord is referring to here. And Jesus tells this man, in a sense, "You can't ignore the law just because you're excited now. You can't forget what God has said, because you want to go see your friends. You need to obey like everyone else." God's grace was free for this man, you notice that? He was saved by faith alone. He didn't have to go to the priests first. The miracle came first. But now that the grace has come, he's got to submit. Those new legs that he had, those were God's legs, weren't his. He didn't make them. They didn't come from his hands. Those new feet he was standing on, those were Christ's feet. They were a gift of His grace. And now the Lord wants him to acknowledge that by taking those feet to the temple. Jesus said, "You're healed. Congratulations. Now go praise God for it. You're saved, Hallelujah. Now go do what he says. Don't stand around gawking about it. Don't hesitate, get on the ball."

And it shows you Christ ways are not our ways. Whereas we would look at this situation and say, "Don't be so hard on this guy Jesus." Jesus would say, "I have to." We would tell Him, "Why don't You lighten up? The guy just got over leprosy. Can't you just give him a second to breathe.?" He'd say, "No, this is too important." God doesn't care if you're healed if you continue to live in sin. You've got to take care of that first.

And just as a side note, this is no small order that the Lord is giving this man because the temple was over 50 miles from Galilee, at the southernmost point of Galilee. But if they're further into the province, it was farther away from that. And it was a trip that would have taken several days, it would have been very, very uncomfortable and difficult because the city of Jerusalem was up on a hill. That's a long way to go if you're a leper. It would have killed him in his former state to try to go that far. But thankfully, he's not in his former state. The guy has changed, Jesus did a work of God in his life, so He sent him on this mission, knowing he could complete it now.

Which would be a wonderful way to end the story wouldn't it? With the leper just heading off into the sunset like he's supposed to. But if you've read this story before, you know this is not how it ends. Because the guy doesn't do what he's supposed to.

And it brings you to one more way that the Lord shows compassion for him, and that's by forgiving him. A fourth way Jesus shows compassion for this leper is by forgiving him, which is the culmination of all that we've talked about this morning. Because as the story comes to a close, you're going to see the guy ignores what Christ says and instead of going down to Jerusalem, he stays where he is. And the Lord pardons his act.

If you read in verse 45, it says the word “but.” That term is important because it marks a contrast. And it shows you that whereas Jesus told the man to say nothing, but show himself to the priests, it says, “but the leper went out, and began to proclaim it freely.” Now, we don't know why he did that. Mark doesn't actually say it, but personally, I think it seems like he's just so excited, he couldn't help himself. There are some who say that the man did this because he was lost, but I don't think that. He doesn't act like a lost person. The verse says he spread the news about Jesus everywhere. I don't know any lost people that do that. I don't know any unbelievers that go around town telling people about Christ. It seems like he's so overcome with joy, he just can't keep running his mouth about Jesus everywhere he goes. Anytime he showed up in town, it was Jesus this and Jesus that. When he came to a new place in his travels, he would say, “Christ did this for me. Christ did that for me. Did I tell you about Christ? Have you ever heard about Christ? Can I say one more thing about my Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Gotta love that.

The problem is, it leads to unexpected consequences because it makes Jesus so popular that Mark says He can no longer publicly enter a city. The guy must have been pretty effective in his evangelism. It doesn't mean Jesus could not enter a city; He can't publicly do it anymore. Every time He goes into a town, He's got to almost come in secretly because the people would swarm Him if he didn't. Mark 1:45 In the middle of verse here, it actually says it got so bad Jesus had to stay in the unpopulated areas because the crowds became so large, that the towns themselves could not contain them. I told you a moment ago that the historian Josephus said that there were 240 towns around Galilee and most of the population was somewhere between a few hundred to several thousand people, which means that however many there were that were following Jesus, there were more than that in His entourage. To the point that He's becoming a nuisance. When He would preach and do miracles, and minister to the hurting souls that were there, the folks would just engulf everything. So He has to stay on the outskirts of town, in the mountains or hills around Galilee, just so there'd be enough room.

This is interesting because we often think of Jesus walking around Israel with 12 disciples, but there were times when there were way more people coming after Him all because of this man. Now to be fair, it's not just because of this man. There's other things that lead to this explosion in popularity, but at this point in the Gospel of Mark, Mark is pointing to him as being largely responsible for this.

And the amazing thing about it is that Jesus knew he would do it. He understood that guy was going to cause all this trouble, which is why He told him not to. And yet He still forgave him. He didn't hold a grudge.

In fact, not only does Jesus forgive this guy, but in a sense, he trades places with him because when you begin the story in verse 40, the leper is the one who can't publicly enter a city. Now Jesus can't. And when you started way back, in the front-end, this man is the one who is asked to stay on the outskirts of town. Now the burden belongs to Christ because they do this, making it a good picture of the Gospel. At the cross, what did Jesus do? He did this for us, and when He died at Calvary, what took place when He traded places? A transaction took place there. Something was put on Jesus and that is our sin. And something was given to us and that was His righteousness and cleanliness because God looked at Him as if He were the leper, and He looked at us as if we were not.

Now all that's not being revealed to the man right here in the passage because Jesus doesn't say, all that about the cross here. That's not the point. The point is that the story gives you a small taste of the heart behind it. Jesus saved this man out of mercy. This man was in a wrong place when he came to Christ with his leprosy. And he's doing some wrong things when he leaves Christ. But He forgives him anyway, just like you and me.

Many of you are following Lord Jesus Christ right now, let me ask you this. Do you ever mess up? Do you ever disobey when God tells you to do something? Of course you do. What does God do? He gives you grace. This is a guy that experienced grace in the beginning, middle and end of the passage. He had grace for breakfast, grace for lunch, and grace for dinner. We all do. You remember what saved King Baldwin's life during the Crusades, it was the mercy of his friends. What kept the leper alive? It was their compassion. That's what the gospel is all about.

Whereas this leper here was healed externally, you've been healed internally through Christ. And whereas the miracle cleansed him off physically, Jesus did that for you spiritually. Whereas Christ touched the leper on the hand, He's touched you in the heart with His own personal power, by removing the guilt of your sin in every part of you. Remember what leprosy was. Leprosy was a disease that destroyed everything. Every corner of your life was ruined by it. And this story is a reminder that when Christ comes, He's going to redeem us this way, by removing the stain of sin in every part. Which is all by His grace. It sounds like a simple thing, but it's not. Listen, your sin is disgusting in the eyes of God. It is horrific. If you don't believe me, I would encourage you to do something. And that is to wake up tomorrow morning and with your phone, just try to count up your sins this week. Can't do it, can you? You'd go crazy by the end of Monday. And yet, give those sins to Christ and He forgives every single one.

One commentator said Jesus never met a disease He could not cure, a problem He could not solve, or a sinner He could not save, if they would just come to Him, because He's Jesus. This is the same Jesus that is one with the Father, second member of the Trinity. He created the world, through Him all things were made, and if you give your sins to Him, He can forgive you because He is strong enough.

I read a story this week about the time a little boy got in trouble because he was playing in a sandbox where he's not supposed to be. And so he had sand all over him, sand in his ears, sand in his eyes, sand in his nose, which caused him to cry about it until he found his father who hugged him and washed it all off. Not because the boy was good. He didn't wash it off because he did what he was supposed to. He wasn't supposed to be in the sandbox. It was because he went to the Father.

My friends, I tell you that story because that's what God is calling you to do in this passage. And that is to go to the Father. Young people in this church, go to the Father. Old saints of grace, you need to do it as well. Are you covered in sin? Doesn't matter. Have you been playing somewhere you're not supposed to? It's okay. If you will leave it alone and turn away from it and fly straight into His arms. Do that, and He will receive you today even if you're a leper. Let's close on a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank You, Lord for this story and the compassion and grace of Christ. We need to read these stories, Lord, because this is not something we can even understand in our own human flesh. Our mercy is nothing like Yours. We feel like when someone sins against us or they disobey or they offend us, they've got to earn their way back into our favor. They need to do good things for us. They need to show us that they're worthy of our acceptance. You didn't ask this man to do that here. All You did was show him unconditional love.

Father, I pray for any who were here this morning who are playing in a sandbox they are not supposed to be in, living a life that's wrong, according to You. And they don't know what to do. They want to be with You, but they're not sure if they can. And they're being told by a lot of people that there's no way they could ever be forgiven. Father, I pray that they would see that all that's a lie. You can save them this morning through Christ when they come to Him and be forgiven.

And Father, I pray that this story would encourage us to go out and live lives of mercy towards others as believers. For those who are Christians in this room, we all have a tendency to get a hard heart and to look at all the hurting and pain and say, "Oh, well, it's just another day in Chilliwack." You never did that. You don't do that now. So God will this bring us to conviction over our sins.

Lord, thank You for these stories that have been faithfully recorded in the Gospel of Mark, about such a Saviour, such a perfect Saviour. May we live lives and honour Him today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.