

# LEPER CLEANSED

Date: March 14, 2020

Scripture: Luke 5:12-15; Matthew 8:1-4

Good morning! My name is Jonathan Christian and in this Lent season we are working through some of the miracles of Jesus shared with us across the gospel accounts. We are looking at how each of these miracles points us to the greatest miracle of all miracles, which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The miracle of Jesus we are focused on today is found in Luke 5:12-15, where Jesus heals a man with leprosy and it begins like this in verse 12.

<sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." <sup>15</sup> But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

Luke 5:12-15

An almost identical account of this story can also be found in Matthew 8:1-4 and in a recent article I read on this very story, Pastor Stephen Witmer, laid down some interesting things about what is really going on here in this particular miracle account, so let's dive in.

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Notice that when Luke tells the story, he begins with a terrible problem. “While [Jesus] was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy” Luke 5:12 tells us. He was “full” of a dreaded disease that, according to Leviticus 13:45, meant that you were required to tear your clothes, let your hair hang loose and cover your upper lip or mustache...all actions typically associated with mourners at funerals.

Why? Because the leper was to be mourning the fact that he had leprosy, which was a like a living death.

Then to make matters worse, because lepers were considered ritually unclean, they were required to stay outside of camp and thus, were cut off from any community and from God’s holy presence in the tabernacle, which, in ancient Israel, was potentially the worst part of this living death.

You see, in ancient Israel, life to the full was lived in the community of God’s people gathered around God’s presence in the tabernacle. Therefore, being cut off was like a living death because it meant that, outside of the community with other lepers, you were being issued a life-long ban from ever experiencing true community, or the blessing that comes from ever being truly known and loved by others, which meant no touch, no hugging and no intimate conversations getting to know someone. Why? Because doing so would make the other person unclean. So with all of this in mind, can you even imagine the shame this leper must’ve felt?

Yet, despite this shame, notice that the leper doesn’t deny his problem. Luke 5:12 tells us, “When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean’”

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Falling on his face, he begs Jesus, calling Him “Lord” as a sign of respect and submission and acknowledging that Jesus can cleanse him if He chooses. What the leper does not try to do is clean himself. Rather, he simply comes as he is, completely vulnerable and transparent...that’s a big risk. In fact, this may be the hardest step for some of us: simply coming to Jesus and to His people, admitting our need without pretense. Whenever we do this, we may fear being ignored, rejected, or even scorned and if that’s sounds like a feeling you can relate to, it’s crucial that you and I look at the final scene in this story.

In verse 13, Luke writes, “And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’” Honestly, every detail of that sentence is significant, so let’s break it down piece by piece.

To begin, notice that this leper respected the physical distance he was required to keep from others. But Jesus crossed that distance when He “stretched out his hand,” moving toward the untouchable man. And Jesus did not just let His hand hover a few, safe inches away. He actually touches him!

What must the weight of Jesus’s hand felt like as it came to rest on this man who may not have experienced physical touch in months or even years? We know Jesus isn’t supposed to touch the man because touching an unclean person rendered Him unclean. We also know that Jesus doesn’t need to touch the man either because He sometimes healed people with just a word. So, if Jesus was not supposed to and He doesn’t need to, why does He touch him?

Listen, human touch is a powerful thing. So powerful that modern studies have shown that skin-to-skin contact with babies facilitates brain development and releases good

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hormones, while lowering stress hormones. Additionally, The New York Times reports that, "Students who received a supportive touch on the back or arm from a teacher were nearly twice as likely to volunteer in class as those who did not." Not to mention, how many of us remember the first time we ever held hands with someone that we love?

Human touch is a powerful thing and by touching the leper, Jesus welcomes him back into contact and into community in a way that he will never forget. And Jesus also speaks to the man. He says, "I am willing." You see, Jesus wants to cleanse him, so when He says, "Be clean." We read that the leprosy immediately left him.

Did you catch that? When Jesus touches the man, Jesus does not become unclean. Instead, the man becomes clean! Which also meant that the massive obstacle separating the man from worshiping God in the temple and enjoying the presence of human community is instantly removed as well. Isn't that incredible?

So, then what does this mean for you and I? Maybe you feel unlovable or unsure about Jesus and how He will respond to you. If that describes you, please hear this: Jesus welcomes you. Better yet, Jesus has the power to cleanse you and heal you and He'll never leave you the same as when you came to Him. So, whatever is keeping you from a closer relationship with God or Christian community, come to Jesus and let Him deal with it.

If it's sin, past or present, Jesus will forgive it as you confess it. In fact, Jesus was even willing to die for that sin and better yet, when Jesus rose from the grave on the third day, He eliminated that sin's power over your life if you are willing to confess it and team up with Him to turn from it.

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He was willing to cleanse the leper and He's willing to cleanse you, too. He wants to cleanse you. He wants to forgive you, further highlighting that Jesus always looks at you not with an expression of disdain, but one of delight, making this the best possible news for any of us carrying the awful weight of shame or guilt. So simply come to Him, confess your feelings to Him, confess your sins to Him and then, in faith, watch the cleansing and healing process begin!

Let's pray.

Lord, thank You so much that You are a God who does not look at us with disdain, but looks at us with delight. And it's our prayer right now that we would believe this enough to humbly come before You holding whatever it is we are ashamed of. Lord, You know what that is and You know how to cleanse and heal us from it. So right now, we hand it over to You, to do the miraculous with it, just like You did with the leper. We love you, God and thank You so much for loving us!