

Touching the Untouchable

Luke 5:12-16

Intro: This section is comprised of 7 stories, most of which Mark also shares (1:40-3:6) in the same sequence.

Within one chapter Luke notes how quickly the fame of Jesus spread.

4:37 - And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

40-41a - Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹ And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!"

42b - And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them

5:1 - On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret,

5:15 - But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

In this chapter, Luke continues to demonstrate Jesus's 'dominion' over all creation, an authority the Father gave him at his baptism.

4:31-37 – He commanded demons.

4:38-44 – He's cured the sick.

5:1-11 – He controlled fish.

5:12-15 – He cleanses a leper.

First: Leprosy in the Bible

Depending on the Bible version, leprosy is mentioned over 40 times and there are 10 actual cases of leprosy in the Bible: Exodus 4:6; Numbers 12:10; 2 Kings 5:1; 2 Kings 7:3; 2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:20; Matthew 8:2; Matthew 26:6; Luke 5:12-16; Luke 17:12

- a) Moses was the first leper in the Bible.
- b) His sister, Miriam, was the second leper.
- c) Other well-known lepers were,

- The Syrian military commander, Naaman, (of whom Jesus had just spoken at the synagogue in Capernaum – 4:27
 - King Uzziah and
 - Gehazi, Elisha's servant
- d) Apart from a miracle, leprosy was incurable.
- e) The law demanded total segregation, even quarantine.

Lepers were the total outcasts, the ultimate untouchables. In India, lepers don't even receive the ordinary protections of the law and are often killed without repercussion.

Second: The Law and Leprosy Leviticus 13

- a) A person suspected of leprosy appeared before the priest 1-3
- b) If leprosy is confirmed, the person is pronounced "unclean" 3
- c) If leprosy is only suspected, the person is quarantined for 7 days 4
- d) After 7 days, the person is checked again. If the suspected area has not spread, he's isolated for another 7 days. 5
- e) If, on the 14th day, the lesion hasn't spread or has lessened, the person is pronounced "clean." 6
- f) The person then washes their clothes and goes home 7
- g) But, if the area again appears or spreads, he presents himself again to the priest and is pronounced "unclean; it is a leprous disease." 8

- Spiritually - Numbers 5:1-3 - *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead. ³ You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell."*

- Practically – Leviticus 13:45-46 - *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.'*⁴⁶ *He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.*

Bottom line: Apart from a miracle, there is no cure for leprosy.

Jesus 'healed' the sick, but he 'cleansed' lepers.

Third: Leprosy as a Type of Sin

To understand the magnitude of what Jesus does, we need to understand the magnitude of leprosy in Israel.

Jews considered leprosy as “the stroke of God” and it was equated with sin.

On several OT occasions, God had stricken people with leprosy as a punishment for sin which only he could cure -

Numbers 12:11-13 - *And Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her [Miriam] not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes out of his mother's womb.” And Moses cried to the LORD, “O God, please heal her—please.”*

In 2 Kings 5, God struck Gehazi with leprosy.

In 2 Chronicles 26, God struck King Uzziah with leprosy.

2 Kings 5:7 - *And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?”*

Even Elisha couldn't heal him but obedience to the prophet's words did –

2 Kings 5:15 - *Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel;*

Leprosy was a powerful object lesson for the encroaching influence of sin and its destructive power. What leprosy does to the body; sin does to the soul.

Fourth: Curing the Leper

a) A word about Chorazin

12 – “*While he was in one of the cities*” = of Galilee, perhaps Bethsaida or Chorazin.

Chorazin sits on a hill above the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Like Bethsaida, it is close to Capernaum.

Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin was the “evangelical triangle” where Jesus most commonly worked during his incarnation.

Matthew 11:20-21 - *Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.* ²¹ *"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!*

b) A word about the leper

1 – the leper's condition – 12a- *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...*

- Luke does not tell us how this leper was able to get close to Jesus.
- Lepers traditionally were isolated, quarantined and lepers were required to stand away from people and announce, "*Unclean*," but there is no mention of that practice in this passage.
- So, this leper broke the law and social norms.
- And no one brought the leper as happened in other situations with Jesus.

V 12 – Whatever the case, there was no hiding this man's leprosy. Dr. Luke notes, "*there came a man full of leprosy...*" –

It may be that people cleared a space for him as he walked to Jesus. Nonetheless, he got within arm's length of Jesus.

2 – The leper's request – 12c - "*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.*"

After Peter, the leper is the 2nd person in Luke to address Jesus as "*Lord*."

- 13 - Jesus responded immediately
- 13 - Jesus "*stretched out his hand and touched him...*"

Jesus did something wholly unexpected.

- He didn't call on God to heal the man. He stretched out his own hand.
- He touched the leper. Touching a leper wasn't forbidden by the law but it was unthinkable by the very nature of the disease.

The people around Jesus must have double-gasped, first at the leper's approach and then at Jesus's touch.

Remember Leviticus 13:45 – "*He shall live alone*" – Can you imagine the psychological effect of this isolation on lepers? They were alive but dead. And how long had it been since anyone had touched this man?

3 – Jesus's response - 13 – "*saying, 'I will; be clean.'*"

- Jesus commanded demons with his word.
- He touched Peter's mother-in-law.
- Here, he both touches and speaks.

This is the voice that said, "*Let there be light*" and light was...even before the sun was created (Gen 1:3).

4 – The healing of the leper – 13c – *And immediately the leprosy left him.*

It's a total cure, from head to toe!

There is a difference in Jesus's healing this leper and all other OT leper cleansings –

- a) Jesus didn't appeal to God like Moses.
- b) Jesus didn't send the leper to a river like Elisha.
- c) Jesus personally healed him.

Point: Someone different than, greater than Elisha or Moses is here!

5 – Jesus's charge – 14 –

- *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."*

According to the law, only priests could pronounce someone cured of leprosy so the man remained in "social limbo" and it was important for his future that he present himself to the priests.

v 15 - Since Jesus healed this man in public, it's going to be hard to keep it a secret. But Jesus doesn't want an early confrontation with the Pharisees.

v 16 - In addition, it appears he wants/needs time alone.

Fourth: The Cleansing Ceremony

No living priest had ever performed the cleansing offering. The last time anyone had performed it was when Miriam, Moses's sister, was cleansed of leprosy in Leviticus 13, thousands of years earlier.

- a) Two birds are presented.
- b) One bird is killed.
- c) The other bird is dipped in the blood of the slain bird – *propitiation* – God has covered our sins.
- d) The leper was sprinkled 7 times with that blood.
- e) The living bird was released into the sky – *expiation* – God has taken our sins away.

GOSPEL: There's a type/foreshadowing of Jesus who has covered our sins and then taken them away.

Fifth: What Jesus is Doing

This is the first, but it won't be the only time Jesus is confronted by lepers. On this occasion, Jesus heals the man by touch.

Luke 17:11-14 - *On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance ¹³ and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." ¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.*

In this account, Jesus touches the untouchable. Leprosy is communicable. Above all other diseases, it most represents sin to Israelites. Normally, when something clean touches something unclean, the clean becomes unclean. And yet when Jesus touches the man, he is not infected, and the man is cleansed.

Remember that leprosy serves as an object lesson about sin. It too is a disfiguring disease that distorts the image of God in us. It is a kind of living death – “*dead in our trespasses*” (Eph 2:25), alive, yet dead and alienated from God.

No wonder Paul cried out, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Ro 7:25).

But when Jesus healed this man, he was reunited with family and friends and reintegrated into the community, socially and religiously.

“Theophilus, this is what Jesus has come to do. He’s cleaning an unclean world.”

This is God’s promise to us.

Community Groups

- 1 – Read the text.
- 2 – What has most impressed you about Luke’s Gospel so far?
- 3 – What has been your most meaningful takeaway so far?
- 4 – What is Luke trying to prove to Theophilus in this section?
- 5 – What do you know about leprosy?
- 6 – What does the Bible say about leprosy and lepers?
- 7 – Did God ever strike someone with leprosy as a result of sin? If so, who?
- 8 – Were there any OT healings of leprosy? If so, who and how?
- 9 – How were lepers treated in Israel?
- 10 – What is leprosy a type of/symbol for?
- 11 – Why?
- 12 – Why is it so amazing that this leper approached Jesus?
- 13 – How did Jesus heal this leper?
- 14 – Why did Jesus send the leper to the priest?
- 15 – How does this story help Luke’s case for Theophilus?
- 16 – What are the modern-day applications of this event?

Daily Devotion

Monday, April 15th. Read Luke 5:12-16, Numbers 12:1-15. For their sin, God struck Miriam, Gehazi and Uzziah with leprosy and leprosy became a symbol of sin in the OT. How might the encroaching nature and destructive power of leprosy teach you about sin? In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “*the safest road to Hell is the gradual*

one... "What does this mean? What does it mean for your life? Examine your own life and look for sin's slow advancement.

Tuesday, April 16th. Read Luke 5:12-16 & 1 Thess 5:22. The appearance of sin isn't sin. Yet Paul encourages his readers to stay away from it. Why should you stay away from even the "appearance" of sin? Think about times in your own life when the appearance of sin has led to sin. What has this taught you? Are there presently any areas of your life where the appearance of sin is tempting you? What will you do about this?

Wednesday, April 17th. Read Luke 5:12-16 & Leviticus 13:45-46. Lepers were clearly identified and then wholly isolated from the community. Why did God do this? What might this teach you about how to deal with sin? Yesterday's devotion asked you what you plan to do with the appearance of sin. Leviticus 13 answers that question: totally isolate yourself from it. What drastic measures should you take to 'cut' sin out of your life immediately?

Thursday, April 18th. Read Luke 5:12-16 & Matt 8:1-4 & Mark 1:40-45. Several gospels (all the Synoptics) record this same story. Why do you think it is important enough to repeat? What does it say about sin? What does it say about us? What does it say about Jesus? How does it warn us? How does it thrill us? What particular applications/changes have you made in your own life?

Friday, April 19th. Read Luke 5:12-16 & Revelation 21:1-5. Why does Luke tell Theophilus this story? How does it fit into the overall Bible story? How does this episode give you hope for your life or someone you know/love? How does it give you hope for the world? Since God is "making all things new" how should you live? What specifically are you doing to participate in "making all things new?" Think of our upcoming VBS as an opportunity to do just that!