

JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH LEPROSY

Luke 5:12-16

Key Verse: 5:13

"Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' And immediately the leprosy left him."

As we know, there are four gospels. It is interesting to note the words each gospel writer used most frequently. Matthew used the word "fulfill" most frequently. For example, Matthew 21:4 says, "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet." Mark used the word "immediately." Mark had been an idle city man. So he marveled at Jesus' immediate actions. John used the word "believe." Perhaps John, a philosophical man, had a certain difficulty in believing. But Luke used the word "mercy" frequently, acknowledging that Jesus' mercy extended even to the Gentiles, whom the Jews consigned to the subhuman level. Today's passage is a story about Jesus' mercy even to the man with leprosy.

First, a sorrowful man with leprosy (12a).

This part tells us how Jesus' mercy extends to a man with leprosy. Look at verse 12a. "While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy." The synoptic gospels deal with this event as one of the important events of Jesus' ministry, in order that the mercy of Jesus might be fully appreciated. Mark described him simply as "a man with leprosy." But Luke the physician described him more carefully as a man "who was covered with leprosy." Of all the diseases that can afflict a man's body, leprosy may be the most damaging. It affects every part of the constitution. It brings sores and decay upon the skin, corruption into the blood and rottenness into the bones. It is both disfiguring and fatal. Lepers were quarantined (Lev 13:46). To prevent accidental contact with others, when they passed by some people, they were required to cover their faces with rags and call out, "Unclean, unclean!" (Lev 13:45). What a humiliating requirement it was!

This leper might have already lost several fingers, and the rest of them must have looked like a wooden rake. He probably walked around limping, due to the numbness of his legs. He must have looked at people with rotten eyes, oozing pus, barely supported by their sockets. At that time, a leper was so pathetic even to think about that people called them "men with leprosy" instead of "lepers." What could the man with leprosy do in his fateful condition? Probably, each time one of his fingers fell off, he would go to a sunny place and bury it in the dirt, then return to the place where

he could nurse his sorrow. This man's psychological disorientation must have been worse than his physical distress.

There was another factor that made him endlessly sorrowful. It was his loneliness. As one sociologist said, man is a social animal. This man must have had a strong desire to live among men and to be accepted and recognized by others. But he was cooped up in a leper's quarantine. He must have secretly run out of the quarantine to refresh himself and walk around. He saw many students who were passing by and laughing and gossiping. He felt compelled to go in and mingle with them, but he could not go in there because he was a man with leprosy. He had to swallow his loneliness again and again, and resign to his fate. On the way back to his quarantine, heavy showers began pouring down. He needed to go into someone's house until the showers passed by, but he couldn't because he was a man with leprosy. He had to stand still like a stone under the roof of someone's house until the heavy showers passed by. Having his whole body drenched did not matter, but when he was overwhelmed by his sorrow in being a leper, suddenly he began to cry endlessly, saying, "I'm a leper and I'm no good." On the way back to his quarantine, he felt too painful to live. But he was too young to die. He was a man with leprosy, isolated from other people. He was a man with leprosy and he was isolated from human society. He was a lonely man with leprosy.

Second, he came to Jesus by faith (12b).

One day he heard the good news that Jesus welcomes anybody and everybody. The words "anybody and everybody" included a man with leprosy like himself, also. It was really good news to him. But for him, to come to Jesus required more than human strength. He was afraid of people's stoning him. More than that, he was used to a lonely life; he hated to go where many normal people were. He was too deeply withdrawn into himself to go to Jesus. But when he heard the good news of Jesus, his heart was moved; especially by the news that Jesus welcomes "anybody and everybody." So he made up his mind to come to Jesus, and he came to Jesus anyway. From a Biblical point of view, this was a decision of faith as well as an act of faith. At that time, leprosy was known to be incurable. Despite his medical doubt, he overcame his doubt; he put his faith in Jesus, believing that Jesus could heal him. When the man with leprosy made a decision of faith, still it was difficult for him to come to Jesus, mainly because of the demons' wild hindrances. Again, Jesus gave him strength to come to him. Jesus gave him the power of faith to come to him; he was able to come to Jesus, not by his own strength but by the power of faith. It is a spiritual secret that God gives us the power of faith to carry out a decision.

When he came to Jesus, he was so ashamed to stand with his disfigured body before Jesus that he buried his face in his rake-like fingers and humbly knelt down and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean!" He knew that he did not deserve the Messiah's mercy. Anyway, he asked for the Messiah's mercy. Even though he was a man with leprosy, he knew Jesus is the God of mercy.

All human beings are in need of God's mercy because they live in the miseries of sin. For example, God loved his chosen people as his firstborn son. God had great hope for them to make them a priestly nation (Ex 19:6). But they forgot all God's grace and lived lives of sin. Because of sin their lives were miserable. But they did not seek God's mercy. Rather, they were very bitter toward God. God was sorrowful because of their bitterness. God could not be merciful to them anymore. But God decided to be merciful to them to the end. However, even God needed comfort, but no one comforted God. So God comforted himself, saying, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Ex 33:19). God's mercy is God's long-suffering patience (Ro 2:4). God's mercy is not to see a man with leprosy as a leper, but to see him as a human being and as a precious child of God. Buddha indoctrinated people about mercy, but his "mercy" was based on human sympathy and pantheism--not to eat cows, not to kill mosquitoes, and not to harm others. But God's mercy is based on his saving grace, and it is spiritual.

Third, Jesus reached out his hand (13a).

Look at verse 13a. "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man." In human history, no one has ever dared to reach out his hand and touch a man with leprosy. One young man brushed his teeth and washed his nose again and again. So his mother asked, "Why are you washing so many times when you have to prepare for final exams?" He answered, "I happened to pass by a man with leprosy, and his smell still seems to remain on my body." Since leprosy is contagious, as soon as people saw a man with leprosy, they ran away like track runners, in great fear that they would contract leprosy. But Jesus did not run away from him. Jesus was not afraid of contracting leprosy. Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, as a father touches his own sick son. Jesus touched him to heal him anyhow and anyway. Human integrity is partial and extremely prejudiced and insolent. There is no mercy in fallen men. But Jesus is quite different from human beings because he is the God of mercy. Jesus embraces all who come to him. When the man with leprosy came to Jesus, Jesus welcomed him and wanted to heal him anyhow and anyway.

Fourth, "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" (13a).

Look at verse 13a again. "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" Jesus not only touched the man with leprosy, but also he said, "I am willing." No one was willing even to look at him, let alone touch him. But Jesus was willing. Jesus was willing to look at him. Jesus was willing to cleanse him. Jesus was willing to heal him. Jesus was willing to help him become a normal man. Jesus was willing to bring him back to his kingdom. Praise Jesus! When someone is asked to do a favor he doesn't like, he usually says, "Well, let me see what I can do for you." This is the way fallen men make excuses. But Jesus was willing. We can also better understand the meaning of Jesus' mercy when we read John 3:16, which says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Look at verse 13 again. "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" In the Bible, leprosy is frequently compared to the symptoms of sin. This part tells us sin damages one's inner man. As leprosy eats into the body, so sin eats into the very constitution of the soul. It corrupts man's mind and heart. It decays man's conscience and will. It makes a man dirty. It wounds and bruises and forms pus in one's inner man. But strangely, while leprosy disfigures man's body, it does not cause any pain. We call this "numbness." The more leprosy spreads in and corrupts one's body, the more he feels no pain. Leprosy and sin are the same in the symptom of numbness.

Many a man commits sin at random. One young man said sarcastically, "I sinned greatly against God last night, but I am okay!" But he ignores his thorn of conscience. He forgets after committing sin, but sin makes his conscience numb. He becomes as dirty as a leper spiritually. Sin corrupts his soul. One young girl committed adultery and thought that she was okay. But sin grew bigger and bigger in her, and she became like Cain who disobeyed God's holy command and lived with a sense of guilt and punishment all his lifetime.

King David is a good example of asking for God's cleansing. He was a king. So he could do anything he wanted. One day he committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal generals. Then he murdered her husband in order to cover up his sin. After that, he was not happy at all due to his dirty conscience. Most likely he must have wondered whether he was a king or a leper. Finally he came to God and asked his mercy, saying, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions" (Ps 51:1). "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow...Create

in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:7,10).

Paul, in his madness, persecuted the early Christians beyond measure. But the Risen Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and forgave him and cleansed his sinsickness. After this, Paul realized that he was a sinner and that Jesus is God who came to this world to save sinners. He exclaimed in 1 Timothy 1:15b,16: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life." Jesus' words, "Be clean!" remind us of John 1:12: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...."

What happened when Jesus said, "Be clean," to the man with leprosy? Verse 13b says, "And immediately the leprosy left him." What a great work of God! His skin became as soft as a baby's. Suddenly he became a handsome young man. When he came to Jesus and asked his mercy, he was cleansed and became a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Fifth, Jesus restored his human relationships (14-16).

Look at verse 14. "Then Jesus ordered him, 'Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.'" Jesus knew that this man's problem was his social life problem. So Jesus ordered him to go first to the priest and offer sacrifices and get a certificate of recovery so that he might live a normal life in society. Jesus was mindful of this man's future life. Jesus did not stop with cleansing his leprosy; Jesus helped him to solve his social life problem. Jesus wanted him to be accepted by his hometown people. Jesus wanted him to be a useful man in society and to be a witness of his mercy, saying, "You know, I was a dirty leper, but by the mercy of Jesus, now I am a handsome young man."

What happened when Jesus healed the man with leprosy? Look at verse 15. "Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses." When Jesus healed a man with leprosy, all the people of Galilee realized that Jesus came to save men from their sins.

In this passage, we learn that Jesus is the God of mercy for those who come to him. Out of his mercy, Jesus touched the man with leprosy and cleansed him. In this

way, Jesus gave him a new life and a new hope. Most of all, by Jesus' mercy he became a normal man who can work hard for the glory of God through one-to-one Bible study, and for the happiness of all mankind. May the mercy of Jesus be with you all.