

## Jesus Cleanses a Leper

### Mark 1:40-45

*Mark 1:40-45 - "Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."*

*<sup>41</sup> Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."<sup>42</sup> As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. <sup>43</sup> And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once,<sup>44</sup> and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

*<sup>45</sup> However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction."*

### Background Notes

In verse 40, why did the leper say, "You can make me clean" instead of "You can heal me," to the Lord? Because under Jewish Law a person with leprosy was considered not just diseased, but *unclean*. A leper had to be isolated from other people and call out, "Unclean! Unclean!" In Leviticus 13:44-46 we read: "*The leper is unclean. The priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his sore is on his head. Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his habitation shall be outside the camp.*"

So the leper in Mark 1 was unusually bold. He showed quite a bit of faith in coming to Christ. Instead of calling out, "Unclean! Unclean!" he said, "*If you are willing, You can make me clean.*" And this leper's case must have been pretty serious since Dr. Luke says this man was "*full of leprosy*" (Luke 5:12). People in that day were even known to throw rocks at lepers to keep them away, so you can imagine the crowd backing off so as not to be contaminated physically or ceremonially by this man. ***But Jesus reached out and touched him!***

In verses 43-44, the Lord warned the man not to go and proclaim this miracle. We see this frequently in our Lord's miracles. The Lord did not want to be known as a spectacular healer and wonder-worker. He did not want people crowding to Him just because of His miracles. He wanted them to come by faith, believing that He was the Messiah.

Notice, by the way, that the cleansed leper's disobedience hindered the work of the Lord (v.45). When the leper went out – and he might have thought with good reason – and began to tell his story freely, the Lord was no longer able to enter the city openly. The man meant well - after all, he had been healed of leprosy - but he disobeyed the Lord. Disobedience of any kind will hinder the work of the Lord in some way.

In verse 44, the Lord told the leper to go and *“show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”* In accordance with Old Testament Law, a Jewish priest had to officially declare a leper clean. Leviticus 14:1-4 - *“Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, ‘This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look, and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, then the priest shall command to take for him...’* The sacrifices that were to be offered for cleansing are listed in the following verses. Then in Leviticus 14:20, *“the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.”*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Leprosy is a picture of sin.

Throughout the Bible, leprosy is an illustration or picture of sin. Leprosy is a loathsome disease and it pictures the defiling aspects of sin. In Mark 2 a paralyzed man was healed, and I think these miracles were recorded together because paralysis also pictures the effects of sin. Sin paralyzes. In the healing of the leper, the picture is the defiling aspect of sin.

Leprosy is a systemic disease – that is, it's a disease of the entire body. You don't get “leprosy of the arm” or “leprosy of the leg” - it's a disease of the system. In the same way, the Bible teaches that you don't become a sinner because you sin; you sin because you are a sinner! You have the disease of sin, and sin is a disease of the system. We're sinners by nature. In the early stages leprosy can be covered up; the sores can be masked. In the same way, in the early stages sin can be covered up. For example, a little baby toddling around in diapers - we think, “Aw. Aren't they cute? There's no way they can be sinners!” But it won't be long before we begin to see that child has a selfish nature, and the child begins to tell lies, and begins to want its own way, and begins to be jealous of other children. In the same way, sin begins to work itself out. It won't be long before that sinful nature begins to show.

In the early stages of leprosy the individual feels pain, but as the disease progresses, the nerves become insensitive to pain. Injuries that are not felt or treated cause disfiguring scars and deformities. In the same way, as sin begins to work its way out in our lives, and we become scarred and disfigured. We actually become desensitized to the sin and the effects of the sin. We don't feel the pain anymore – the pain in our own lives, or the pain that it causes others.

Leprosy continues to disfigure the body. In the same way, sin continues to gnaw away in us. While it's not so noticeable in the early stages, eventually it works out its terrible consequences to body, soul and spirit. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century there was no known cure for leprosy, and without a supernatural cure, leprosy led to death. In the same way, there is no human cure for sin – the cure for sin comes only through a supernatural healing through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## 2. Cleansing from leprosy is a picture of salvation.

If leprosy is a picture of sin, then cleansing from leprosy is a picture of salvation. The leper had to call out, "Unclean! Unclean!" and be separated from other people, and of course that meant he was separated from the Covenant Community. He couldn't go to the Temple. He couldn't bring sacrifices. He was put out of the community in every way - he was totally set apart. In the same way, because of sin, a person is not only unclean and "diseased" - he is totally separated from the family of God. We must come to Christ for healing before we can become part of the family of God.

In verses 41-42 the Lord Jesus said, *"I am willing; be cleansed."* And as soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed." The cleansing was immediate and complete. When we come as sinners to Christ for salvation, we are cleansed immediately and completely. Our sins are immediately and completely forgiven! As Psalm 103:12 says, they are removed from us *"as far as the east is from the west."*

Notice that there was no question that the Lord was willing to heal the leper. The man said, "If you are willing..." and the Lord said, "I am willing; be cleansed." All the leper had to do was come by faith, believing the Lord could heal him. In the same way today, the problem is not the willingness of God to forgive the sinner, but the willingness of the sinner to come to the Lord, admitting his sin and asking for cleansing. In 2 Peter 3:9 we read, *"God is not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."* Cleansing from leprosy is a picture of salvation – and the Lord is willing to cleanse from sin. All we have to do is come to Him.

## Practical Application

### 1. Have you felt the touch of God?

In God's sight, we're "lepers" until God touches us with salvation - and He is willing to reach out and touch us, if we'll let Him. But maybe we don't want the touch of God. Maybe we'd rather be "lepers" than to have to deal with a holy God. Or maybe we refuse to admit that we're "lepers." We think we're pretty good - hey, we've never done anything *really* bad! Well, if that's the case, we're blindly ignorant of our true condition.

Or maybe we know we're "lepers," but we think we're too far gone. Sin has so distorted us physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually that we feel that even God can't help us! Listen, God's love is as great as His power - and His power is as great as His love! Let God touch you today. Come to Him for salvation in Christ.