

A Leper is Cleansed

Mark 1:40-45

(preached 8/31/14 Pine Grove BC; Sunday AM)

As a kid, I watched a lot of television.

My grandmother's favorite show was The Price is Right.

During the summers, we watched it every day.

Now, the commercials associated with that show were often geared toward ladies in the home.

They would advertise detergents, fabric softeners, air fresheners....

But my favorite commercial was for Dawn dish detergent.

In it, they would show a sink covered in a greasy slime...

Then add a single drop of Dawn and the grease would run to the corners.

Then say, "Dawn, takes grease out of the way."

That picture of grease fleeing the scene was a huge selling point.

And one that has stuck with me.

The same principle applies when tear gas is shot into a crowd.

If you have been watching the demonstrations in Missouri over the past few weeks...

You have seen people scatter when the tear gas is displayed.

The same could be said for a live grenade being thrown in a crowd.

There would be an immediate scattering of people in all directions.

Such is the scattering effect of a grenade or tear gas or even Dawn dish detergent.

And that picture in your mind is something that will help you understand the incredible scene...

That is before us today in Mark 1:40-45.

If you have been here over the last few weeks, we have watched Jesus go from an unknown to a celebrity.

He arrived on the scene in the wilderness as pretty much an unknown man.

He was baptized without much notice.

He was sent into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan without much notice.

Very few people even heard him when he began preaching in Mark 1:14-15...

There were no crowds when he walked along the Sea of Galilee to call Simon, Andrew, James and John.

And even when we entered the synagogue, it probably happened without much notice.

But then, he teaches and casts out a demon, and everyone takes notice.

Then he heals Peter's mother-in-law, and before you know it, the whole town is at the door..

Wanting something from Jesus.

And as he casts out demons and disease from the multitudes in the city, we saw last week that he had to escape before sunrise...

Just to spend some time alone in prayer.

But even that time was interrupted as the disciples came to get him.

Jesus has gone from unknown to well-known in one day.

No one knows him on Friday afternoon when he called the disciples, but by Saturday night...

They are lined up at his door.

And we can imagine the scene.

Picture the media that surround celebrities, who can hardly even move.

This is the scene around Jesus except it is not a small crowd but an entire city.

The mob is coming and we learned last week that is not what Jesus desired.

He had no desire to be known as a miracle worker.

He was the King, who was the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

He was not sent to get people physically ready for the kingdom, but to get them spiritually ready.

The people didn't need their sickness healed, they needed their sins forgiven.

Unhealthy people can stand before the Lord but unholy people cannot.

So Jesus mission was to preach the gospel not to practice medicine.

But the crowds were pressing in on Him seeking his miracles.

And it was preventing his preaching ministry.

So, there's this picture is in our minds of these people crowding Jesus....

And now, I want to read the verses that we will examine this morning.....

So take your Bible and open it to Mark 1, beginning at verse 40...

*⁴⁰ And a leper *came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." ⁴¹ Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and *said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³ And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, ⁴⁴ and He *said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that [u] Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but [v] stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.*

This morning we are going to look at 5 parts of this passage...

The Coming, The Compassion, The Command, The Contradiction, The Change.

So, let's begin back in verse 40 with...

I. The Coming (v40)

And a leper came to Jesus...

Cancer is a horrible disease; every family is touched by it.

And as dreadful as cancer is, imagine if it were contagious.

Not only would churches be empty, but so would many stores, shops and schools.

But even that doesn't compare with the horror of leprosy.

We fail to understand how horrible this disease was in ancient times.

When we see the precautions that are taken with Ebola virus and other highly contagious diseases,...

We get a small sample of what it is to live in the days where leprosy was everywhere.

I can adequately describe leprosy, but I want to read a quote from an expert on the ancient disease...

Here is how he describes leprosy....

'No other disease reduces a human being for so many years to so hideous a wreck. It begins with tiredness and with pains in the joints. Then there appears on the body, especially on the back, discolored patches. On them little bumps form, at first pink, then turning brown. The skin is thickened. These bumps gather, especially in the folds of the cheek, the nose, the lips and the forehead. The whole appearance of the face is changed until the man or woman becomes unlike human, they lose their human appearance and look, like a lion. The bumps grow larger and larger; eventually they burst forth with a foul discharge. The eye-brows fall out; the eyes become staring; the voice becomes hoarse and the breath wheezes. One of the worst symptoms of Leprosy is that infected area loses all sensation. This may happen without the sufferer knowing that it has happened; and he may not realize that it has happened until he suffers some burning or scalding and finds that there is no pain and no feeling whatsoever where pain ought to be. As the disease develops, the injury to the nerves gets worse. The muscles waste away;. There comes the progressive loss of fingers and of toes, until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of growths. The average course of the disease is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma and ultimately death. The sufferer became utterly repulsive both to himself and to others'.

That is dreadful.

You may think that not having pain would be a benefit of this disease.

But that is what kills you.

Pain is actually a great blessing.

It causes us to stop doing activities that are harmful.

When you grab a hot pan, you let go.

But imagine grabbing a hot pan and it eventually melting your skin and you never know it.

All you see is the wound that results.

And these wounds become entry ways for more germs and disease until they fill your body.

All the while these scabs are covering your body and you look like something that isn't human.

And to top it all off, leprosy was highly contagious.

Now, there were a number of skin diseases in the ancient world, but leprosy was the worst of the worst.

It would wipe out entire communities because people lived so close together.

For that reason, the Lord established law for dealing with leprosy.

The laws prevented the entire nation of Israel from being wiped out due to leprosy.

Leviticus 13-14 are two chapters dedicated to dealing with this disease.

Listen to Lev. 13:45-46...

⁴⁵ “As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be ^[ae]uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ ⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

If you think the physical effects of leprosy were horrible, imagine the social consequences.

A leper had to keep his clothes torn to identify himself as a leper.

He had to live alone away from society to avoid spreading the disease.

But when he did go into town, he had to shout “Unclean, Unclean” wherever he went.

They were away from their family, they were away from the temple, they were away from friends and they were wasting away.

Leprosy was the worst kind of disease because it killed a person slowly...

And it killed him while he was all alone.

Now, remember that picture of the dawn dish detergent scattering the grease...

Or the tear gas making the crowd run away.

This is exactly what happened in verse 40.

You have crowds pushing in on Jesus.

And then a leper comes near him.

They would have scattered like the grease on top of the dishwater.

Everyone would have avoided a leper.

Some people would not eat fruit from roadside markets if a leper had walked down that road.

Others would go so far as to throw stones at lepers.

And for one to come to Jesus broke all the laws of what lepers should do.

So, when we see in verse 40 that the leper came to Jesus, fell on his knees and asked to be made clean..

There is little doubt that the crowds are still there.

When everyone runs away, the Lord remains.

And to the leper's credit, he comes in the most humble way possible...

He comes begging, not demanding....

He comes kneeling, not standing....

Luke's account of this says that the leper even fell on his face.

He comes knowing, not wondering.

Matthew says he came worshipping.

He knows that Jesus can heal him.

"You can make me clean" are the words of a man who sees the power of Jesus.

These are the actions of a humble man coming to Jesus.

But these are also the actions of a desperate man coming to Jesus.

He risked much in approaching Jesus on this day.

The penalty for a leper coming into contact with others was a stoning on the outskirts of town.

But the risk was worth the reward.

And that may be you today.

Maybe you are risking much to be here this morning.

Maybe you are risking relationships or popularity or money or whatever...

But that is a good place to be.

The Lord wants a humble heart, but he wants a desperate heart as well.

Now that we have witnessed the coming of this leper...

Let's see....

II. The Compassion (v41-42)

*⁴¹ Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and *said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.*

We have witnessed the tenderness of our Lord before...

He heals everyone regardless of their faith or social status or gender.

I pray that you never get tired of seeing the compassion of Jesus.

How much more compassion do we need in our lives.

We may not have lepers in our day, but we have outcast that no one would approach.

May we not turn away when they come to us; may we like Jesus be moved with compassion for them.

And then Jesus does the unthinkable...

He touches a leper.

Now understand, Jesus doesn't have to touch him to heal him.

In John 4, he heals a nobleman's son from a distance.

Never touches him.

But here, Mark says that Jesus touched him.

And it is not the touch that you give to a dirty Kleenex,...

Jesus held on to the leper.

Who knows how long it had been since this man had been touched by anyone?

And here is Jesus grabbing him.

I'm guessing there were gasps from people standing far away.

Did you see that?

He touched the leper!

And then Jesus speaks...

“Be clean.”

And it is done.

That's where compassion and power collide.

Years of suffering gone in a single touch.

That's the tenderness and authority of our Lord.

We are struck by it.

And then we see Mark's favorite word..

“Immediately....the leprosy left and he was clean.

We have seen this power before.

Not, take two aspirin and call me tomorrow healing.

Not, fall to the ground and get better later power.

Jesus healed a man with leprosy.

And notice two things happened...

The leprosy left...

And he was cleansed.

That means that every shred of evidence that he had the disease was gone immediately.

I have a scar on my forehead that I received while playing tag in 2nd grade.

The pain is gone but the scar remains.

When Jesus healed this man, he was fully cleansed.

If he had a withered hand or foot, it was restored to perfection.

If his face looked like a lion or another creature, it was no more.

If he had scars from burns or cuts, they disappeared.

This is not hocus-pocus, your back feels better healing.

This is not healing that cannot be measured.

This is the healing of our Savior.

You need a new foot, you got it.

Your skin is scaly and scarred, its back to where it was previously.

I'm sure yall have seen those pictures where they use computer to show what criminals may look like today.

It ages them, well Jesus does just the opposite here.

The years that leprosy had tacked on to his life were gone in an instant.

Leprosy is still around today; it's called Hansen's disease.

But if you get leprosy today, they have medications that cure you of it.

But they are unable to reverse its effects.

So even today, lepers live the rest of their lives with reminders of the disease.

But not this leper on this day.

He was cured instantaneously and completely.

We have seen the coming and the compassion...

Let's look at....

III. The Command (vv43-44)

*⁴³ And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, ⁴⁴ and He *said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”*

For us, this makes no sense.

If you have been around the church for any length of time, you know we are told to go and tell others about Jesus.

But here, Jesus says tell no one.

If fact, in the original Greek, it's a double negative.

Say nothing to nobody.

Why Jesus?

Well, we saw this last week.

Jesus has no desire to be known as a miracle worker or healer.

The casting out of demons and the healing from a disease is a way to prove who he is.

If you will, it is a side show.

The main show is Jesus' preaching ministry of calling people to repentance.

And it is in serious trouble if he is surrounded by people wanting physical healing.

So, he tells the leper to say nothing to no one....

Except the priest...

And this is very important.

The leper is told to go see the priests.

Now there would a local priest that he would go see, but to get a clean bill of health...

He would have to eventually go to the priests in Jerusalem.

If the local priest saw no evidence of leprosy, he would still need to wait before going to get a certificate from the priests that he is clean.

Only then could this leper re-enter society and be treated like a normal Israelite.

If the priests in Jerusalem saw no evidence of leprosy, there is a special ceremony that they must do,...

Which is also found in the book of Leviticus.

But here is the amazing part, no Israelite in the OT was ever cured of leprosy.

Miriam was cured before this law was established, and Namaan was cured but he was not an Israelite.

So, when this leper walks into the temple at Jerusalem, and says that he has been cured of leprosy...

It is the first time it has happened since the law had been written over 1400 years earlier!!

Talk about a surprise and special ceremony.

And though Jesus obeyed all the law, the point of sending the man to the priests is to alert them...

Of something much bigger than a man being healed from leprosy....

Yes, that hasn't ever happened, but more important, Messiah is here.

And let me tell you Pine Grove, it is wonderful news to hear that someone has been cured from a disease.

We will always praise the Lord for that...

But as good as that news is...

The greater news is when people are cured of their sin.

Don't be distracted by healing...

Stand in awe and fall down to the One who can work such wonders.

Jesus wanted this man to keep his mouths closed to everyone but the priests....

Yet, in verse 45....

We see....

IV. The Contradiction (v45a)

⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around

This causes so many problems for us.

We totally understand and are sympathetic with his actions.

He has been cured.

For the first time in a long while, he can walk down the street and shout “I’m clean. I’m clean.”

For the first in a long while, he can go to the temple, he can eat with his family.

He can be normal again.

How can he not tell anyone?

Oh, how we want to give him a free pass here.

But we must remember, he just violated a direct command of our Lord.

Jesus was clear in his instructions, and we must never turn to our own wisdom in times like this.

We need to obey even if we don’t completely understand.

Good intentions do not cancel out clear instructions.

It is better to obey and wonder why than to disobey and satisfy our flesh.

And this is not the last time, we will see this.

Jesus will tell others to keep their mouths closed, and we will also see their disobedience.

But let me be clear.

Jesus may have once said don't tell, but he now says go and tell.

And to not do so is just as disobedient as the leper on this day.

If you have been healed from your sin, go and make disciples.

That is our command today.

Now that we have seen..

The Coming, the Compassion, The command, and the Contradiction, let's finish with....

V. The Change (v45b)

⁴⁵But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that ^[u]Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but ^[v]stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

In case you were wondering, disobedience has consequences.

Though we sympathize and understand why the leper spread the news, his disobedience was costly.

The rise in popularity made it impossible for Jesus to enter any more cities.

The leper's excitement may have prevented others from hearing the good news of the gospel.

Jesus had now cast out a demon, healed a woman from a fever, cast out disease and demons in a city...

He had cured an incurable disease.

And he had done it instantly and completely.

If it was possible for him to get more popular, it even increased more when the leper talked.

And what do we see from Jesus?

He will start escaping in boats to escape the crowd.

HE will start teaching from boats to avoid the crush of the people.

His plans begin to change.

And notice where he goes....

HE begins going to unpopulated areas.

Now, who lived in unpopulated areas?

Lepers.

The outcasts of society were out here.

When this scene begins, here is Jesus in the city and the leper in the outskirts.

Now, the leper is healed and able to stay in the city....

But Jesus is sent to the outskirts of town.

Yet, we see that even the people are still coming to him.

But what a great picture that is for us

The rejected leper gets accepted because of Jesus' touch of healing.

While the beautiful Jesus is forced to go to the place
where the leper once lived.

But what a beautiful trade for the leper.

Conclusion

And I want to end with three simple principles that you must see from this story this morning.

#1 – Leprosy is a picture of sin.

It starts small.

It eventually covers your entire body.

It will eventually deaden your nerve endings as well..

You will sin and never experience the pain.

It will make you an outcast.

People will see you coming and turn the other way.

You will lose friends, family and everyone who is important to you.

Until you are left alone.

When you meet people, you might as well yell...

I'm a sinner.

I will eventually destroy you too.

Stay away. Unclean!

It will scar you.

It will deform you.

Even if it doesn't show on the outside, it will eat you up with guilt on the inside.

It will devasate your body and leave you dead on the side of the road.

Listen to Charles Spurgeon,

At first, when sin catches us in its net, it is with the tiniest spider's cobwebs, that can scarce be seen; and they seem as though you could break from them in a moment.

Then they become silken bonds: then firmer still, until a man seems to be enveloped in a tangle of cables, and every cable hardens and becomes as iron or triple steel until at last there is no escaping, for sin gathers daily force until it gets a monstrous power over men.

The second lesson to see here is...

The cure for sin is found in the touch of Jesus.

Sin, like leprosy, has no cure apart from Jesus.

If not far an encounter with Jesus, this leper would have died alone in his disease.

And you, without the cure of Jesus, will eventually die alone in your sin.

Sin has one destination, - death.

IT will infect and kill the healthiest looking man.

You need that sin to disappear and only Christ's touch offers immediate and complete healing.

One touch from the Savior and all your past, present and future sins are gone.

Never to be seen again.

The Bible says that they are removed as far as the east is from the west.

Adrian Rogers said that a man repents and believes the gospel...

That God takes all a man's sins, casts them into the deepest ocean, and hangs a sign that says no fishing.

That is what a touch from the Lord does.

And finally...

Trading places with Jesus is a beautiful for the sinner.

The leper ended up in the city and Jesus ended up all alone.

That is a beautiful picture of the gospel.

The sinner is brought into fellowship with God by the lonely death of Jesus on a cross.

Sinners trade places with Jesus.

Salvation is the great exchange.

A sinner exchanges his sin for Jesus' righteousness.

God looks on a sinner and sees Christ because he looked on Jesus at the cross and saw a sinner.

The old saying goes, "I'd love to trade places with him for a day."

But the truth of the gospel is that you can trade places with Jesus for eternity.

And every time that God looks upon you, he sees His precious Son.

Do you need to make that trade today?

Are you an outcast who is sick with sin?

Do you want to trade places with Jesus?

Jesus said, "Repent and believe the gospel."

Let us pray.