

## I.N.I.

Third Sunday after Epiphany  
January 24, 2016  
Mark 1:40-45

In Christ Jesus, who has cleansed us from the leprosy of sin that infects us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Two weeks ago we had the Bible lesson of the Ten Lepers at our Bible Study at Heritage. After the class some of the ladies there asked if leprosy was still around. We Googled it and found out that it is still present especially in warm and wet climates. 80% of the cases today are in India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Brazil and Nigeria. It is now called Hansen's disease.

Of all the diseases that afflicted people in the Bible times the one that was the worst was leprosy. Worst for several reasons: 1) at that time it was incurable 2) those who suffered from this disease were separated from family, friends and society into leper colonies, they became social outcasts 3) it was a hideous, disfiguring disease, eating away at the extremities of the body: fingers, toes, nose and ears. 4) it was very painful 5) it was a disease that carried with it the stigma of sin. The people were looked upon as unclean. Leprosy was considered God's punishment upon the sinner. At least 3 Old Testament people were struck down with leprosy as a punishment by God for their rebellion or unbelief; Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah.

With that as a background we again read the first verse of our sermon text. Vs. 41 **THEN A LEPER CAME TO HIM, IMPLORING HIM, KNEELING DOWN TO HIM AND SAYING TO HIM, "IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN."** This same event is recorded in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In Matthew we read, **AND BEHOLD, A LEPER CAME AND WORSHIPED HIM, SAYING, LORD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN."** In Luke we read, **A MAN WHO WAS FULL OF LEPROSY SAW JESUS; AND HE FELL ON HIS FACE AND IMPORED HIM, SAYING, "LORD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN."**

It is important to read all three versions to fill out this lesson. Was this leprous man a believer or just someone looking to Jesus for healing? From Mark's Gospel you can not be sure. But both Matthew and Luke write that he called Jesus, **LORD** and in Matthew we read that he **WORSHIPED HIM**.

Knowing this, we see how the man expressed his faith in his request. First by his falling to his knees and kneeling before Jesus. Luke even reports **HE FELL ON HIS FACE**--a sign of humility and reverence before Jesus. Secondly we see his faith in his request. He was **FULL OF LEPROSY**, yet he did not demand from Jesus to be healed, he did not expect healing because of any goodness on his part, he humbly resigns himself to the will of the One who is infinitely more powerful and more wise than he and says, **LORD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN**. In that request we also see a strong testimony that Jesus is the almighty Son of God who has power over disease. The man knew that Jesus had the power to cleanse him. At the same time he cast himself entirely upon Jesus' mercy and will.

To those standing around Jesus, this action was not only shocking, but it was against the regulations of the Levitical Law. A leper was not to come any closer than 6 feet from a clean person. They were to cry out "**UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN,**" so that no one would accidentally get close to them on the roadway. This man probably knew that if he did this, the crowd around Jesus would move away and he would miss his opportunity. So he casts aside the letter of the law and runs up to Jesus and falls at his feet.

What does Jesus do? Does He reprimand the man for breaking the ceremonial laws, for coming close to contaminating Him and the people around Him? Does He back away from him afraid of getting contaminated?

No, we see that Jesus was **MOVED WITH COMPASSION**. His heart was touched both by this man's great need and by his humble faith. Jesus was so moved that He also did something that was totally unacceptable in Jewish society. **HE PUT OUT HIS HAND AND TOUCHED**

**HIM.** This would have made Jesus ceremonially unclean. One commentator wrote, "If a rabbi touched a leper, that would make bigger headlines than if a rabbi healed a leper." It was unheard of. In Jewish society touching a leper stood second only to defilement from touching the dead. Alfred Edersheim wrote in his book **THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JESUS THE MESSIAH**, that no one was even to greet a leper. As we said six feet was the mandatory distance but if the wind was blowing hard, it would be even more. Some rabbi's bragged that they would not even eat food that was purchased in a street where there was a leper. Others said they would throw stones at them to keep them far off, while others hid themselves from them or ran away. They looked upon them as having been cursed by God and therefore disdained them.

But not this Rabbi, Jesus. The almighty Son of God did not recoil from touching the lowest of the low in order to cleanse him and bring him back into fellowship with God's people. When it comes to the requirements of the ceremonial law, love and compassion take precedence over ritual and regulation. The touch showed Jesus' love and His Word performed the miracle; **I AM WILLING; BE CLEANSED.**

The cleansing process was not a natural, gradual healing as medicine might bring about, it was instantaneous. We are told, **AS SOON AS HE HAD SPOKEN, IMMEDIATELY THE LEPROSY LEFT HIM, AND HE WAS CLEANSED.**

Jesus' next words may seem strange. We are told, **AND HE STRICTLY WARNED HIM AND SENT HIM AWAY AT ONCE. AND HE SAID TO HIM, SEE THAT YOU SAY NOTHING TO ANYONE.** Why would Jesus give such a strong warning to this man not to tell anyone what had happened? Several reasons have been suggested. One is that Jesus did not want unnecessary publicity so that people would flock to Him for miracle healing rather than listen to His Words and follow Him as their Savior and Lord. It could also be that Jesus felt that too much of His time would be taken up by those who would besiege Him with medical requests, but who had no interest in Him as their Savior from sin. It could also be that the people were not spiritually ready to see in Jesus their Savior and these miracles would only lead them to think of Him as a great prophet who had miraculous abilities, not as the Son of God.

Another reason could be that the more his popularity increased the more his opposition increased. Hatred and opposition was building which would ultimately culminate in His crucifixion, and the more His fame spread the more opposition He would face. It was not yet time for His arrest and suffering to begin. One last reason could be that Jesus did not want the priests to know of this miracle until the man showed up on their doorstep.

Jesus continued His words to this man, **...BUT GO YOUR WAY, SHOW YOURSELF TO THE PRIEST, AND OFFER FOR YOUR CLEANSING THOSE THINGS WHICH MOSES COMMANDED, AS A TESTIMONY TO THEM.** Many of the priests of Jesus' day were some of His worst enemies. They rejected His claim that He was the Son of God and said He was guilty of blasphemy. They accused Him of being a Sabbath breaker because He performed miracles on the Sabbath. The first they would hear of Jesus' miracle would be from this former leper.

What a powerful witness and testimony this man would give to them. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, sent from heaven, who has power over disease. They would have this silent witness before them for 7 days, since that was the period of time required for the ceremonies to be complete and for the person to be checked by the priests and then certified to go back into society as one now clean. This witness would also refute any charge that Jesus was a lawbreaker and had no concern for the law. Jesus' sending the cleansed leper to the priests demonstrated that He had not come to destroy the law but to fulfill the law and thereby bring an end to the ceremonial part of the law.

However, the cleansed leper could not help but tell others what had happened to him. He spread the word around to so many that Jesus could **NO LONGER OPENLY ENTER THE CITY, BUT WAS OUTSIDE IN THE DESERTED PLACES; AND THEY CAME TO HIM FROM EVERY QUARTER.**

We mentioned earlier that leprosy carried with it the stigma of moral uncleanness, one being punished by God. By birth we too share a common moral uncleanness. We were helpless to

avoid the sin which has separated us from God and because of which we deserve God's eternal wrath and punishment. Through conception and birth we are totally infected with the leprosy of sin. Daily more and more spots break out as we rebel against our God and sin against our neighbor. Our sins are as real as the white spots of leprosy on the diseased man's skin. We must cry out to God and the world that we are **UNCLEAN!** We must come before our Lord on bended knee with our face to the ground and say: **LORD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN.**

And what a wonder to see and to know that:

### **I: JESUS IS WILLING**

Christ did not use His almighty power to condemn us, rather He reached out to touch us and to cleanse us. John writes, **THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN. IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE NO SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US. IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.** In Isaiah we are told, **THOUGH YOUR SINS ARE LIKE SCARLET, THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW; THOUGH THEY BE RED LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BE AS WOOL.** And Paul tells us in Ephesians that Jesus cleansed us by the washing of water with the Word.

### **II: JESUS HAS CLEANSSED US**

This cleansing is offered to us in the Gospel. The Good News is that Jesus was not only willing to cleanse, but that He did cleanse us through His shed blood. Even as Jesus touched the leper and healed him, Jesus has touched us, He took our place, in fact He took our disease of sin and its consequence upon Himself. At the same time His holiness flowed out to us. The great exchange has taken place. Our sins exchanged for Christ's righteousness.

Do we all realize what a great blessing that is? Like the leper, yet even worse than him, our disease of the leprosy of sin was not only terminal, it was eternal. Leprosy would only lead to death. The leprosy of sin leads to damnation and eternal death. This man threw himself upon Jesus' mercy and he was healed. We throw ourselves upon the mercy of Christ who has come in undeserved love and we are forever cleansed.

### **III: TESTIFY ABOUT IT**

How will we respond? The man was strictly told, **DON'T TELL ANYONE**, but he couldn't help but tell everyone. We have been told the opposite, **TELL THE WHOLE WORLD, TELL EVERYONE WHAT I HAVE DONE FOR YOU, HOW I HAVE HEALED YOU FROM THE LEPROSY OF SIN.**

Have we? Are we doing it? Holy, thankful living is the response of the converted, joyful, cleansed soul. In the case of the leper the testimony was given to the priest and offerings were made. In our case our testimony is brought before the Lord Jesus every Sunday as we bring our Savior heartfelt thanks and offerings of praise for all He has done for us.

In the case of the cleansed leper he went out and **BEGAN TO PROCLAIM IT FREELY, AND TO SPREAD THE MATTER.** His life was changed. In our case we too need to freely, willingly go out and tell the whole world what Christ has done for us. Our life is changed. Does it show in our lives?

Do you young adults show to your friends, classmates and roommates, fellow workers that you are a redeemed, cleansed child of God in your talk, in your walk, in your behavior, in your actions? Or are you still living as if you are diseased with the world's way of life? Do the spots of selfishness, sexual sins, disobedience and rebellion show in your lives?

As older adults, do we show to our friends, family and fellow workers that we are redeemed, cleansed children of God in our talk and walk and way of life? Do we speak to others about the Lord Jesus and about all that He has done for us, that it makes all the difference in the world? Or do our leprous spots more often than not show, as if we are no different than those who have no saving knowledge of their Lord and Savior, those who haven't been cured of this spiritual disease?

Jesus has commanded us **GO YOUR WAY...SHOW YOURSELF...AS A TESTIMONY**

**TO THEM.**

The talk show circuit is filled with people proclaiming to the world what has happened to them and their philosophy of life. Some expound on positive thinking and a better way of life, others on how they healed themselves from cancer by self-will and got through sexual abuse or other past abuses by self-determination. Still others will talk about how they got through the loss of loved ones by looking deep inside themselves for the power or endured disasters by having faith in themselves. In most cases the glory goes to man and the philosophy is man-centered and empty.

We have the Good News that gives glory to our Savior-God and it is the saving philosophy that comes from the wisdom of God Himself.

Every single person is conceived in the leprosy of sin and is doomed to die eternally. But Christ came to take our leprosy upon Himself and to give us the healing of His perfection. In Christ we are cleansed and will live forever. What a testimony to give, what great news to tell!

Amen.