

Cleansing the leper

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev Hugh M.Ferrier

[0 : 00] Luke chapter 5 at verse 12. It came to pass when Jesus was in a certain city, behold, a man full of leprosy, who, seeing Jesus, fell on his face and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And he put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. Now it's interesting to read this account, not only here in the Gospel of Luke, but to go to the other Gospels, to the other evangelists, Mark and Matthew, and read their account of this same incident.

It is Mark who gives us the longest account of what happened here. And it's Matthew who tells us where it happened and precisely when it happened.

He tells us that it was after Jesus had preached the Sermon on the Mount, that famous sermon that so many people talk about. Jesus had just preached that Sermon on the Mount, and he had descended from the hill.

And this is what Matthew writes. When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him, and behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

[1 : 43] And possibly it was that this man lived in one of the towns near that hill where Jesus preached the Sermon. Like many another, he had come out that day to listen to Jesus.

But this man was different from all the others because they could come together and they could crowd together around Christ on the hill.

But this man couldn't do that. He was a leper. And as a leper, he had to stay on his own. And you can almost see the picture of this poor man.

There he is, standing all alone. A pathetic figure. A dejected man. A despairing man.

But nonetheless, he is listening to the wonderful words that are coming from the lips of Jesus. And he begins to listen as he has never listened before.

[2 : 50] And now he is listening with the closest of attention. Because what was Jesus saying in that sermon? Well, one of the things that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount was this, and it must have stirred the heart of that poor man.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Oh, that must have stirred this man's heart as he listened to that. If I seek first the kingdom of God, he was saying to himself, then all the other things will be added to me.

Maybe it is I'll get rid of my leprosy if I seek first the kingdom of God. And as he went on listening to Christ, there was something else that Christ said in that tremendous sermon.

It was this. Jesus had said to the people in the sermon, Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find.

[4 : 02] Knock, and it shall be opened. And as he listened to these words, he thought to himself, Ask. Oh, that's what I must do.

I must ask him. I must ask him to deliver me from this terrible condition. From this awful disease that is bringing me to an untimely end.

And so, that's how we find this man coming to Jesus. It came to pass when he was in a certain city, a man full of leprosy, who seeing Jesus fell on his face and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will be thou clean. As for a little moment, look at this man.

A man full of leprosy. What a dreadful, what a terrifying disease. We are reading in our papers about these dreadful and terrifying diseases.

[5 : 17] Here was this man, and he had a dreadful disease, and he knew that it couldn't be cured, except by divine intervention.

No one could help him. He was well aware of that. He was a leper. And if you turn to Leviticus, chapter 13, reading from verse 1 on to verse 46, leprosy is described for us.

And all the symptoms are outlined in that chapter about this terrible disease. It wasn't just a superficial disease.

It was a deep-seated disease. It began, as it tells us in the book of Leviticus, with a rising, as it says there, or a scab, or a bright spot.

And then it all tended to spread over the flesh. And then after a while, the raw flesh began to appear. And we are told that leprosy is a disease that attacks not just the skin of the body, but it goes far deeper than that, and it enters the bloodstream, and it affects the blood of the body.

[6 : 49] And affecting the skin and the blood of the body, it has affected the flesh of the body. And then it went on to attack the bones, and affected the bones of the body.

Until the unhappy patient began to lose his body inch by inch. He literally began to rot away.

As someone has said, leprosy brings sores and decay upon the skin. corruption into the blood, and rotteness into the bones.

And indeed, in those days it was regarded that if anyone had leprosy, he was as good as dead. He was virtually a dead man, or a dead woman.

And the law concerning the leper in the Bible, which was laid down in the old economy, was this.

That after a man who had the leprosy, or a woman who had the leprosy, was examined by the priest, the priest was to pronounce that man utterly unclean.

[8 : 04] And the law went on, the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and he shall call out, unclean, unclean.

All the days wherein the leprosy shall be in him, he shall be defiled, he is unclean, he shall dwell alone without the camp, his habitation shall be.

Now that's interesting because the three symbols of sorrow for death were precisely these.

Whenever someone died in your home, you rent your mantle. That was the first thing. The second thing was you bared your head.

And the third thing was you placed a covering on your upper lip. And that is precisely what the leper had to do. He had to rend his mantle, uncover his head, put a covering on his upper lip, and cry, unclean, unclean.

[9 : 23] And that's what this poor man had to do. And in those ancient times, it was also regarded as a judgment from God.

Do you remember Miriam? She was the sister of Moses and the sister of Aaron. Moses and there was that occasion when she began to find fault with Moses' wife.

And she criticized her and was in danger of bringing contempt upon this great man's partner in life. God wouldn't have it. And she was struck down by leprosy. And at last her brother Aaron came to God in prayer.

And Aaron cried out to God, let her not be as one dead of whom the flesh is half consumed. You can almost see the great man Aaron pleading for his sister.

[10 : 38] Oh Lord, he says, don't let her be like a dead woman. I know she's done wrong. I know she shouldn't have done this about Moses' wife.

But don't let her be like a dead person. And there was another you remember who experienced this kind of judgment from God.

It was the servant of Elisha, Gehazi. He came, you see, to Naaman with a pack of lies. He brought dishonor upon the name of the God of Israel.

He brought dishonor upon Elisha himself. And he went out from the presence of Elisha a leper to the day of his death.

But again, you remember the same thing happened to King Uzziah who tried to usurp the office of priesthood. Oh, there was Uzziah and he thought to himself, well, I'm as good as any of these priests.

[11 : 40] Why can't I go into the temple and burn incense? And so he thought he would do it without going through the mediation that had been prescribed by God. And God said, no, you will not come into my presence.

You're not fit to come into my presence. The only way that you can come into my presence is through my prescribed way which is the way of mediation.

And so poor Uzziah dwelt, as we are told in the Bible, in a several house, a leper to the day of his death.

And it's Luke, and of course Luke, as you know, as we've already said, was a doctor, a medical man, a very skilled medical man. And he has his eye for all these details and he says this, that the extent of the leprosy was complete.

A man full of leprosy. There was no hope of a cure.

[12:50] He was full of it. And oh, how his whole appearance must have been repulsive. For in his condition, you see, the flesh upon him would be horribly distorted.

Have you sometimes looked at these magazines begging for charity for the lepers? Have you seen these pictures of these poor people with their rotting limbs and their swollen faces?

And here was this man horribly distorted, body full of sores, rotting away, living in loneliness and living in misery.

Some have said, you know, that this was precisely the condition in which Job was when he went on to say, yea, yea, young children despised me.

I arose and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me and they whom I loved are turned against me.

[14:05] My bone cleaveth to my skin and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth. Have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me.

Well, that's what this man was like. But he came to Jesus. He fell on his face and besought him saying, if thou wilt, Lord, thou canst make me clean.

It was an appeal. And here you see the man had absolute confidence in Christ's ability to heal him.

Perhaps he had heard of the power of Jesus, but at any rate he had personal faith and Mark tells us that the leper came beseeching Jesus, kneeling down to him, and Luke here tells us that he fell on his face and besought him.

That's the attitude that brings a response from Christ. And he makes his earnest plea, Lord, he cries, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

[15:32] And as we have already said, he had listened to Jesus in his sermon on the mount saying, ask and it shall be given. And here is this man and he makes his earnest plea and he asks, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And you will notice here his recognition of Christ's sovereignty. You see, the matter of cleansing depended entirely upon Christ.

Christ. This man recognized that it depends on you, he says. It doesn't depend on me. It's not my faith that will bring about a recovery.

It's not anything I can do or anything that I can negotiate as far as you're concerned with you in any terms. I can't do anything, he says to Jesus. I depend upon you if thou wilt.

If it's your will. And we must always remember that prayer, the prayers that we make can only be answered if they are in accordance with our Lord's will.

[16:52] Isn't it the shorter catechism that puts it? Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will.

But just a point more. The response of Jesus. What was the response of Jesus? Ah, well, you see, his compassion.

He put forth his hand and touched him. In Mark's version it tells us there, Jesus moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him.

Oh, this must have been like an electric shock going through this man. Up until this moment he had been shunned.

No one would come near him, no one would touch him. Up until this point he had to adopt the attitude of mourning and cry pitifully, unclean, unclean.

[18:07] Up until this moment people looked at him with abhorrence. Up until this moment he knew what it was to be loathed by men and women.

And being full of leprosy, it's reasonable to suppose that his appearance bore all the marks of the awful disease. And he must have presented a sickening spectacle to everyone.

This man represented the tragedy of the human race. This man represented ruin and the tragedy that sin has brought into the world.

Jesus touched him. It was the first touch of a human hand for many a long day. Jesus touched him. Oh, how he must have felt being drawn into the embrace of Christ. How gracious and compassionate Jesus was to him.

[19 : 28] And that's how Jesus is to this day. People that you want touched, that I want touched, people that you are afraid of and that I am afraid of.

Ah, these are the very people that Christ is ready to embrace and touch. And we thank God for it. There are sometimes people and I look at them and you look at them and we say to ourselves, that man's hopeless.

Nothing can be done with him or us. They're beyond the grace and mercy of God. No, they're not. They're not beyond the grace and mercy of God.

And often enough in compassion, Christ will touch them. I will be thou clean.

And these were words of divine power and divine authority. authority. And this man who was incurable and beyond all human hope, was suddenly the subject of Christ's omnipotent power.

[20 : 49] And the result was immediate. And immediately, it must have been staggering for those people who knew this man, immediately the leprosy departed from him.

It was just like that, as sudden as that. You remember when Naaman the Syrian complied with Elisha's request and dipped in the Jordan seven times, we are told the result was immediate. It says, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And this is what must have happened to this man.

All the distorted flesh began to come right. The sword went. His flesh was now like the flesh of a little child.

blood. The blood was purified. The bones suddenly became strong and healthy.

[22 : 07] The man was cleansed. And this happened immediately, demonstrating once again that this man of Nazareth is none other than what he claimed to be, the son of God, with power to heal.

And Jesus charged him to tell no man but go show thyself to the priest and offer for thy cleansing according as Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.

And it's marvelous how Jesus saw to all these little details. angels. You see, he knew that this man had been banished from the synagogue, at least from the ordinary public place in the synagogue. He had been banished from the temple precincts. He had been banished from society, almost, banished from all the religious festivities that went on and the privileges.

And in order for him to be restored to all these and given his place once again in society, it was absolutely necessary for him to go to the priest and for the priest to pronounce him clean.

[23 : 29] And instead of that, the man began to publish the whole thing abroad. he was too precipitate in his actions.

He was far too precipitate with the result that these priests would be displeased that here was this man doing something that he had no right to do until they gave the instructions that he could do these things.

And why I say that is, do you see how Jesus is concerned even about the small details that have to do with our lives and that have to do with our place in society?

Well, I must leave it there. You know, friend, maybe you say, what has this got to do with me? Well, what I've been trying to tell you is this.

Do you see how compassionate Jesus is? How compassionate he was to that leper of long ago? He's still the same. Maybe you don't have leprosy, but you've got to sin.

[24 : 47] Maybe you don't have the same problems that this man had, of loneliness, and isolation, but you still feel cut off.

Well, here is Christ, and just as he dealt in mercy and in compassion with this man of long ago, he is still the same Christ.

You come with your sin, he'll touch you. You come to him with your problems, he will help you. You come to him with your loneliness, and he will befriend you. He is still the same. Jesus had compassion, he put forth his hand and touched him.

His touch is still the same. Let us pray. O Lord our God, we give thee thanks that Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[26 : 07] And as we have our own different problems, and the greatest problem of all that we have is this problem of sin, we thank thee that our Saviour is there to touch us, to cleanse us, to befriend us, to give us back our rightful place in life.

May it be so with each and all of us. Be with us throughout the rest of the day, and come out with us in the evening. In Jesus' name we ask all our men.