

## A Leper Like Me

Matthew 8: 1-4

- I. The life of a leper was painful in many ways (Leviticus 13:45-46).
- A. Leprosy is physically painful. It causes nerve damage and inflammation leading to neuropathy and constant acute pain.
  - B. Because it was so contagious, lepers had to be separated out.
    - 1. They were ostracized. People were afraid of them.
      - (a) They could not be close to people, other than lepers.
      - (b) They certainly would not be touched by people.
      - (c) They could not marry.
      - (d) They could not conduct business or work near people.
    - 2. The Law even set them apart in how they dressed.
    - 3. When they came near people they had to cry out, "Unclean, unclean."
  - C. To make matters worse they were ceremonially unclean.
    - 1. They could not go to the temple or participate in corporate worship.
    - 2. People thought that disease was a sign of God's judgment.
      - (a) So, they were rejected and judged as people cursed by God.
  - D. Particularly in a shame/honor culture, leprosy brought shame.
    - 1. So, in every way, physically, socially, spiritually, emotionally, it was painful.
    - 2. It also was hopeless. There was no cure.
    - 3. You could not help yourself. There was nowhere to turn.
- II. News of Jesus, the teacher who heals, was indeed good news!
- A. "Could he, would he, actually heal me?"
    - 1. He hears the stories about Jesus and faith begins to stir.
      - (a) "Is there hope for me?"
    - 2. In his desperation, he seeks Jesus.
      - (a) This takes boldness. He must go near people.
      - (b) He must ask this holy man for mercy for an unclean man.
    - 3. But his faith is growing. Jesus can do this.
      - (a) But will he? He has heard of the kindness of Jesus.
    - 4. He approaches: "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." He comes humbly but his words are full of faith.
      - (a) "I know you are able to do this, Lord."
    - 5. The extraordinary thing happens!
      - (a) In the midst of his uncleanness, Jesus touched him.
      - (b) That in itself is powerful!
      - (c) "Lift your head, brother. You have dignity. You are loved."
    - 6. In that same instant, Jesus speaks: "I am willing. Be clean."
      - (a) In a moment's time, his rough skin with its open sores is transformed.
      - (b) His skin is new, like the skin of a baby, soft and clean.
      - (c) No more pain. He is overcome by awe and a flood of joy!

## III. The story is a picture of us encountering Jesus through the Gospel!

- A. Every healing Jesus did is a picture of what happens spiritually.
  - 1. We were spiritually dead, blind, unable to hear, speak or walk
    - (a) We trust in Jesus, and everything changes.
    - (b) We are raised to new life.
    - (c) The "eyes of our hearts" are opened to perceive spiritual truth.
    - (d) God begins to speak to our hearts, not audibly, but we hear.
    - (e) We are able to speak forth a word from God.
    - (f) We walk each day in a relationship with God.
- B. The leper is us.
  - 1. We were unclean, separated from God by our sin.
    - (a) We were apart from God's people.
    - (b) Yes, sin is contagious. Character had its negative impact.
  - 2. Our sin was causing us great pain, but we were often unaware of it.
  - 3. We were basically lost. We couldn't save ourselves.
  - 4. Then God began to work.
    - (a) Maybe you felt empty.
    - (b) Maybe your life crashed and burned (addiction, depression, hopelessness).
    - (c) You were covered in shame, isolated, feeling desperate.
    - (d) Or God began to show you that there was more to life.
  - 5. Then God sent one of his people to you.
    - (a) That person had experienced God's love, had found life in Jesus.
    - (b) A friendship began.
    - (c) That person cared about you, cared for you.
    - (d) They began to tell you about a different reality, a new life, in which you would be made clean.
    - (e) A relationship with Jesus. He would take your shame.
    - (f) He would wash you clean and embrace you as his own.
  - 6. God showed you your desperation, that you were lost, and that you could not save yourself.
    - (a) There was something that you could only get from Jesus.
    - (b) In faith, you turned your heart to Jesus.
    - (c) "Lord, if you are willing. You can make me clean."
    - (d) "I am willing. Be clean." And everything changed!
- C. The appropriate response: testimony and sacrifice.
  - 1. "Go show yourself to the religious people."
    - (a) The leper has the cure. That is us, with the Gospel.
  - 2. No sacrifice is required to be cleansed. It is a response.
    - (a) We are the sacrifice (Romans 12:1).
    - (b) We give ourselves to the one who cleansed us (2Cor5:15)