

Jesus Can Make You Clean

Luke 5:12-16

Pastor John Miller

In Luke 5:12-16, Luke said, “And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold...” or “look” “...a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him...” or “begged Him” “...saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately the leprosy left him.” That’s so beautiful. “And He charged him to tell no one, ‘But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.’ However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.”

The title of my sermon is Jesus Can Make You Clean. I’ve taken that title from verse 12, which says, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” How does Jesus make the vile, filthy person clean? The answer is in verse 20, which says, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” He forgives our sins. Our text is the story of a leper being cleansed, and the next section is a lame man being healed and able to walk. So Jesus forgives our sins and cleanses us, and then He restores us and enables us to walk in His ways that please Him.

Our story pictures Christ’s miracle of the cleansing of the leper. Pictured in this miracle is how God forgives us and cleanses us from our sin. This miracle is also recorded in Mark 1:40-45 and in Matthew 8:1-4. So all three of the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—give the record of Jesus cleansing this leprous man. The Bible says, “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1). Whenever there are multiple recordings of a single miracle, that is an evident sign that God wants us to get the message portrayed or pictured in that miracle.

This story paints the picture that Jesus is willing and able to cleanse us from sin, to make us whole and to restore us. The picture here of Jesus is beautiful. He’s compassionate, sympathetic, kind and willing and able to cleanse us from our sin. That’s good news! Because the Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). It also says, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). So we all are like this leprous man. And we all need Christ to cleanse us and to forgive us and to restore us. In the Scriptures, leprosy is a picture of the uncleanness of sin. And God alone has the power to cleanse us from sin.

Now there are four movements in the story. The first movement is the dreaded disease itself, verse 12. “And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold a man who was full of leprosy...” This is the setting. Luke uses the phrase, “and it happened,” so it is an indefinite period of time. We don’t know how long after the last episode it was. Then Luke says Jesus was “in a certain city,” so we don’t know what city this was that Jesus was in. Most Bible scholars believe it was perhaps Capernaum, where Peter lived, because Jesus had been with Peter, James, John and Andrew in the boat, and Jesus was going to make them fishers of men

(Luke 5:1-11). Or it could be in the area of Gennesaret, the plain on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, in one of the little villages or towns there. But we don't know.

Matthew 8:1, regarding this incident, says that Jesus had encountered this leprous man "when He had come down from the mountain." In the context, Jesus had come down from the Mount of Beatitudes. In Matthew 5-7, Jesus was on the Mount of Beatitudes teaching the disciples. In the Bible days, it wasn't called the Mount of Beatitudes, but since Jesus had taught the Beatitudes there, that's why we now call it that.

This is a beautiful mountain; it's one of my favorite places to visit when we travel to Israel. My favorite thing to do there is to teach through the entire sermon on the mount. We cover all of Matthew 5-7 as we look at the view from where Jesus would have been sitting when He taught the beautiful sermon on the mount. So Jesus had just finished His sermon on the mount, had come down the mountain and encountered this leprous man.

Now notice how his sickness is described in Luke 5:12: "Behold, a man who was full of leprosy." Only Doctor Luke, being more specific, adds this little bit, "full of leprosy." Other Gospels say, "a leper." "Full of leprosy" means that his whole body was affected by this terrible disease. In Bible days, leprosy was the most dreaded disease. Second only to death, no one feared anything more than leprosy. Someone who had leprosy lead a very sad existence. It was a dreaded disease because you had to be ostracized from all others. Leviticus 13-14 speaks of leprosy. The leper was an outcast; he was barred from family, friends, the Temple, the synagogue and the city. He lived outside of all society.

In our day, this disease is known as "Hansen's disease." We now have antibiotics that can be used to treat it. Leprosy still exists today, but it is not as prevalent as it was in Jesus' day. It is now treatable and can be eliminated with antibiotics. But in Bible days, there was no treatment for leprosy, so it was a dreaded disease, and the leper was ostracized from society. So if the leper in our story was married, he had been separated from his family. If he had children, he couldn't hug and kiss them and tuck them in bed at night.

So in Bible days, lepers were taught to stand at least six feet away from other people. They had to cover their mouths, and everywhere they went, they would have to cry out, "Unclean!" Can you imagine what that did to your social life?! So it was a very loathsome, dreaded disease. People would lose their limbs, their fingers, the tip of their nose, their ears, their facial hair and their skin would become infected. They would get numb, hurt themselves and become infected and lose hands or feet or legs. Josephus, the ancient historian, described it as "a living death."

In the Bible, leprosy was a picture of sin. You can't understand this story unless you understand the doctrine of sin. The Bible tells us that sin is the result of Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden. They disobeyed God, and that brought sin, which brought death into the world. So leprosy is a picture of sin, and we need a Savior.

Now we move from the dreaded disease to the second movement of our story, the desperate

victim, at the end of verse 12. This man who had leprosy had seen Jesus. What a blessed thing when we see Jesus! “He fell on his face and implored Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’” This man came to Jesus needing a healing, so Jesus would touch him, speak to him and would heal him.

I want you to notice five facts about how this man came. This is really the heart of this story. Number one, he came out of an awareness of need. He was “full of leprosy,” or covered with leprosy. He was aware of his need for healing. He was coming to Jesus out of a sense of need.

When we come to Jesus, we must come to Him out of a borne sense of need of a Savior. We must come to Him with a sense of “I am a sinner; I need a Savior.” It is by the grace of God that He allows you to see your sinfulness, your wretchedness, your uncleanness, that you are unrighteous and you must come to God with your sin for salvation. We must come to Jesus “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

In the sermon on the mount that Jesus had just given, in context, He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:3-4). If you want to be blessed, you need to see yourself as virtually bankrupt before a holy God. And you need to see your need of a Savior. We need to accept that we are unacceptable before a holy, righteous God. The Bible says that “All our righteousnesses...” or “our best” “...are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) in the sight of a holy God. So no one comes to Christ with real repentance for salvation unless God grants them the ability to see their sinful heart. It’s a sign of God’s mercy when He allows you to see that you’re a sinner and need a Savior.

Number two, this man came to Jesus in reverence. Verse 12, in seeing Jesus, “He fell on his face.” The word “fell” here literally means that he fell down to worship Jesus. In Matthew 8:2, Matthew actually said that the leper “worshipped Him.” To fall down here means “to kiss,” because when you laid prostrate on the ground, it would look like you’re kissing the ground. So in the Hebrew, it was a word used for worship. The leper came to Jesus out of a sense of need, that he was a sinner; and he came in reverence, because he fell on his face and worshipped Jesus. He knew that Jesus was God in the flesh.

Number three, the leper came to Jesus in humble submission. Verse 12 says, He “implored Him...” or “begged Him” “...saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’” In the Greek, this is in the present tense, so he kept saying and kept saying. “Lord, if You are willing....Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”

So this leper is laying on his face, prostrate before the Lord and saying, “If You are willing.” He wasn’t questioning Jesus’ ability; he was questioning His willingness. He was basically asking, “Are You willing to heal me? I know You can, but I’m not sure what Your will might be.” He humbly submitted to Christ as his only source of healing.

God is always willing to forgive you. He not only is able; He is willing. Jesus said, “The one

who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). We learn from the story that there is no one too sinful to come to God. If you realize your sin today, and you're under conviction, come to Christ. Come humbly, submitting to Him.

Notice that, number four, the leper came in confident faith when he said, "You can make me clean." He said, "I don't know if You're willing, but I know You're able." The Bible says, "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). We come to God by faith. The Bible also says, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves." Salvation doesn't come by your own efforts. "It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). So we come believing and trusting by faith.

The leper had perhaps seen Jesus heal. Or perhaps he had heard from others what Jesus had done for them. And he thought perhaps that Jesus could forgive him, heal him and touch his body and make him clean.

Number five, the leper came to Jesus as he was, unclean. This is inferred in the text, because he didn't try to clean up his life before he came to Jesus. A lot of people feel they are too sinful to come to Jesus. But no one is too sinful to come to Christ. Jesus knows everything about your sin, yet He loves you and will forgive you if you will turn from your sin. That's what the word "repent" means; it means "to change your mind," "metanoia" or "to change your direction." So you see yourself as a sinner, you change your mind and you turn from your sin and follow Jesus.

The leper saw Jesus and came to Jesus, but I believe Jesus came to the leper as well. Everyone else was running away from the leper, but Jesus was going to the man. Jesus is always attracted to the person with the greatest need.

If you say that you are the chief of all sinners, as Paul did in 1 Timothy 1:15, then Jesus is thinking about you and wants to forgive you. There is no one too sinful or no one too good to come to Jesus. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We must all come to Jesus for salvation.

Now we move from the dreaded disease and the desperate victim to the third movement of our story, which is my favorite, to His divine compassion, verse 13. This is Christ's response to the man with this dreaded disease of leprosy. "Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately the leprosy left him." And "immediately" the leper was healed; not over days, weeks, months or years.

Number one, Jesus touched the man. It's a wonderful day when Jesus touches you. Jesus could have healed him with a word from a distance. If it was me, I'd say, "Stay right there! Don't come any closer! Be healed! Stay away! See you later." If the wind was blowing from the leper toward you, the leper had to stay 100 feet away from you.

Jesus can speak a word and heal. He didn't have to touch the leper. It was highly against the

law at that time to touch a leprous person. If you touched the leper, that made you unclean also. Then you couldn't go to the Temple or to synagogue or go back home. But Jesus touches the untouchable. Jesus touches those who people run from. He touched you and me. He reaches out to those who the world despises.

Why did Jesus touch the leper? I want to think that Jesus wanted to lovingly, graciously, compassionately touch him so that he would feel it in that touch. Jesus would express more than just a touch. The word "touch" in the Greek means "to take hold of." So Jesus didn't just touch him quickly; Jesus held on to the man. Jesus probably embraced him. Everyone watching must have been freaked out when Jesus touched him. But after that touch, the man instantly had no leprosy; he was no longer a leper. This might have been the first time in years that the leper had felt a human touch.

I heard of a man who was so lonely that he would go every week to have his hair cut, just to feel someone touching him and have someone to talk to.

This leper would be touched by Jesus. The touch expressed more than a superficial touch would. Jesus wanted him to feel His sympathy and compassion. And that is the reason for the Incarnation. John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son..." or in the Greek, "The only begotten God," even more powerful "...who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." The word for "declared" is "exegesis" or "explained Him." "The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). And verse 18 says that Jesus came to explain God to us.

So who is God? He is compassionate, sympathetic, loving, kind, and He takes hold of us. What a blessing! God became a man, so that "in all points [He was] tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). So Jesus' hand touching the man conveys His Incarnation. "I understand. I love you. I will. Be cleansed." How marvelous a truth.

Number two, Jesus then spoke to the man. He said, "I am willing; be cleansed." Those were words of assurance. When you trust Jesus as your Savior "to forgive [your] sins and to cleanse [you] from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9), your response is to believe God's Word. It's as simple as that. John 3:16, the whole Bible in one verse, is a verse of assurance. It says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have..." present possessive "...everlasting life."

Do you believe that? Rest in that. What do you have to go on? God's Word. Not your feelings or emotions or experiences, but the Bible, the Word of God.

So Jesus physically touched him, took hold of him, then Jesus spoke to him. He—and we—have God's Word. We must rest in His promises.

Number three, Jesus immediately cleansed him. Verse 13, "Immediately the leprosy left him." It was forbidden to touch a leper, but the minute Jesus touched him, he was no longer a leper.

And instead of Jesus contracting his leprosy, Jesus imparted to him His righteousness. The Bible says, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So Jesus paid for our sins on the Cross so that He could communicate or impute to us His righteousness.

In 1 John 1:7, it says, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." What a blessed thing it is that when we trust in Christ, when we call out to the Lord, He cleanses us and washes us and forgives us.

You should never outgrow the wonder of God's amazing grace in saving you, a guilty, lost sinner. You were unclean. But God granted you the ability to see your need and to come to Him for forgiveness; that He would open your heart and your eyes to Him, then you would trust Him and He would save you by His grace. Then you would be washed and forgiven.

The fourth movement in our story is in verses 14-16, the definite command. This is an interesting part of the story. "And He charged him to tell no one." The other Gospels indicate that he did tell others. How do you not tell others about this?! You've been a leper, ostracized from all society, you want to go back to your family, but you can't tell anyone what happened to you?!

It's funny that we get forgiven of our sins, we become Christians and the Bible says that we should "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), but we don't say anything. Yet this man was told not to say anything, and he blabbed it to everyone. May God help us!

So Jesus gave the man this command and instruction that many people have a hard time understanding. Jesus said, "But go and show yourself to the priest." This is where Leviticus 14 comes into play. It gives instructions to the priest when a leper would be cleansed and come to him. But this could only happen when Messiah came. These would be the steps to be taken for that cleansing. Showing himself to the priest would likely mean that he would have to leave Galilee and travel a couple of days down to Jerusalem for that to happen.

Verse 14, "'And make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.' However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities." Part of that "multitudes came" was because the man was blabbing it to everybody; telling everybody what Christ had done for him. So then Jesus did not respond to the crowds, but "He withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed," the King James translation says. So here again, Jesus is being overrun with crowds wanting to be healed, so He went to a quiet place to be alone and pray and talk to His Father.

"He charged him to tell no one. 'But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.'"

Number one, for a practical reason, this charge was given to be a witness to the priest. That's

why He says, in verse 14, “as a testimony to them.” The priest would have Leviticus 14 before him in Scripture. But the priest would say, “We’ve never had to use this! No leper has ever been cleansed!” So why is it that all these lepers start to show up? This guy named Jesus is cleansing them. Maybe it would start to compute to the priest that Messiah has now come.

Number two, for prophetic reasons this healing was given to show that Messiah was predicted that He would heal, that He would forgive, that He would restore and that He would cleanse from leprosy.

When John the Baptist, who looked at Jesus and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29); who baptized Jesus in the Jordan River and saw the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit come down in the form of a dove, and the audible voice of the Father, who said, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17)—when John was put in prison, he doubted. So John sent one of his followers to Jesus to ask Him, “Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3).

It blows my mind that someone like John the Baptist would doubt, but if you get thrown in prison, you could struggle with doubts as well. Why was he doubting? Because he believed the Messiah would come to deliver him. “Why am I not being delivered? Why am I not being rescued?”

So John’s followers came to Jesus with their question, and Jesus told them to go back to tell John that “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended...” or “scandaled” “...because of Me” (Matthew 11:5-6). And they went back and told John the Baptist. John then rested in that word; that He is the Messiah, because of the miracles Jesus was performing. So John was aware of that earlier, but now He is assured of it.

So the healing of the leper is a Messianic miracle that the Messiah had arrived.

Number three, for what I call “pictorial reasons,” this miracle was given to picture the Cross. In Leviticus 14, the leper who was cleansed was to bring two birds, a stick of hyssop wood, some scarlet-colored thread and a bowl to the priest. The priest would take one of the birds, kill it and it would bleed into the bowl. Then the living bird would be tied to the hyssop stick with the scarlet thread and dipped in the blood in the bowl. The bird would be taken out, loosened from the stick and fly away. As it flew away, the blood would sprinkle off its wings. The priest would take the blood-covered stick of hyssop, sprinkle it on the leprous man seven times and he would be declared cleansed. He could then go back to his family, synagogue and his life.

This miracle was a picture of Jesus’ death on the Cross, His burial and His Resurrection. And the living bird flying away and dripping blood was a picture of Christ rising from the dead. So there was a pictorial reason for this story. Our text is a literal, actual story about a man who was leprous and was healed. I believe in the historicity of this story and that it was a miracle. But it also was pictorial and conveyed the picture of the Cross of Christ, who died on the Cross

to forgive us and cleanse us from our sin.

Jesus was also giving in this story a pattern of having compassion for people who most of the world despise. Sometimes I'll see somebody who really looks messed up, and I say to my wife, "Man, that guy is messed up!"

She'll say, "Yeah, that's what you looked like before you got saved." Wow! She always lets me know that. I knew that I was blind and now I see. I knew that I was unclean and now I'm clean.

But many times we get so comfortable in our little Christian "bubble" that we say, "I'll get cooties! I don't want to touch them; they're unclean!" But Jesus touched the untouchable. And so should we. His compassion, His sympathy and His mercy should be seen in us; that we would be like Christ with His sympathy and compassion, reaching out to those who are in need.

In conclusion, we come to Jesus how? With a deep awareness of our sin and a sense of our unworthiness. "Wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked." We come to Him for forgiveness, for cleansing, for clothes and restoration. We come with reverence and humility. We come with brokenness and respect and "believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." And we come just as we are.

If you feel you are not worthy to come to God, maybe you don't even feel worthy to come to church. I've invited people to come to church, and they say, "If I come to church, the roof would fall on me." I don't think so. I like that Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest....And you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

You can go to the drugstore and buy sleep. But you can't find rest for your soul. Only Jesus can give you rest in your soul. So you come to Him just as you are—weary, worn and sad.

And you come to Jesus in faith and believing. The leper said, "You can make me clean." So we know that Jesus is willing and able to forgive us and cleanse us. There is no sin too great that God's grace won't be able to cleanse. There is no disease so heinous that God's love won't be able to forgive and cleanse.

"I came to Jesus as I was,

Weary, and worn, and sad;

I found in Him a resting place,

And He has made me glad."