

Touched by the Master's Hand Luke 5:12-16

A recent Forbes article noted that in the first three months of the year 8 cruise ships were infected by the very contagious norovirus. ON one ship alone, Royal Caribbean's Explorer of the Seas, 600 passengers became ill. That may make you think twice about taking a cruise and it gives a whole new meaning to being sea sick.

A report that just came out this last week gives a new meaning to dirty money. Researchers from the New York University found some 3,000 different types of bacteria on a dollar bills. It makes you want to consider laundering your money.

This morning we take as our text **Luke 5:12-16**. We find in our passage a comparison between the physical and spiritual. The same way that Jesus meets the physical need of the man in our text is the same way He meets the spiritual need of anyone who comes to Him.

Let's consider these three points.

The condition of the man

The compassion by the Messiah

The circulation among the multitudes

I. THE CONDITION OF THE MAN – v. 12

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record this event. Our account as recorded by Luke begins in an unnamed town. Unlike knowing the town where Jesus was born, which fulfilled prophecy, the location of this town isn't important. It's inconsequential to the story or to the outcome. It could have been any town in Palestine. What is important is understanding the implications for what Jesus did that day.

We read that Jesus was in one of those towns, whether just passing through or whether camped out and teaching in the synagogue as He did in

Capernaum is unclear. What we do know is that He was in a town and an important lesson is about to take place.

Our text continues by noting that while He was in this town a man came up to Him. Now if we just stopped there we would not see anything unusual in this. Throughout His ministry there are recorded for us many incidents in which He was approached by people. We find that it was generally for one of three purposes. Many came to hear Him teach. It was different than what they heard from other teachers. Others came to Him with a specific need requesting His help. Finally, there were those who approached Him to question Him on some matter of the Law, usually attempting to trick Him in order to discredit Him as a teacher.

Our story is about the second type of person who approached Him. He had a specific need. The need was leprosy and he wanted Jesus to do something about it. We see four things about him.

A. His Disease Was Unbearable

This man had leprosy. We won't take the time to go back to **Leviticus 13** to read what the law had to say about this disease. We would note that there were several skin conditions that were classified as leprosy. Luke, being the observant doctor, notes that the man was *covered with or full of leprosy*. He had an aggravated advanced stage of leprosy.

Leprosy was a dreadful disease. It primarily attacks the body's nervous system so that the leper eventually loses the ability to feel. The infected parts of the body go numb and eventually lose all sensitivity. Leprosy technically never killed anyone. Death generally came due to the damage that was done to the body as a result of the person's inability to feel pain.

It forms lesions on the skin, and can disfigure the face by collapsing the nose and causing the skin to

fold. Some have called it the “lion’s disease” because the face looks like a lion. The skin may bunch around the eyes and ears with a specific odor to it. Contrary to popular opinion, leprosy does not eat away the flesh. Due to the loss of feeling caused by the disease, extremities would wear away. It caused horrible disfigurement.

The progression of the disease begins with pain in a certain area, then numbness, followed by spots. The spots would become thick, glossy and scaly. The spots would then become dirty sores and ulcers due to poor blood circulation. It often affected the larynx giving the person a very hoarse or raspy voice when speaking.

How long he had it is uncertain. We assume that it was unbearable because He came to Jesus really as a last resort since it usually culminated in death.

B. His Despair Was Unfathomable

Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee describes how it may have happened. We assume the man was Jewish. We are not told how the man discovered that he had leprosy, but it could have happened in the following manner. One day he came in from plowing and said to his wife, ‘I have a little sore on the palm of my hand. It bothers me when I am plowing. Could you put a wrap on it for me?’ His wife bandaged his hand, but the next day the sore was worse. In a few days they both became alarmed. His wife said, ‘You should go to the priest.’ He went to the priest who put him in isolation for fourteen days. When he was brought out the priest looked him over and found the leprosy had spread. The priest told him he was a leper. (How those words must have cut like a knife.) The heartbroken man said to the priest ‘Let me go to my wife and children and tell them goodbye.’ The priest replied, ‘You cannot tell them goodbye. You will never be able to take your lovely wife in your arms again. You will never be able to put your arms around those precious children of yours.’ The

man went off, alone. His family brought his food to a certain place and then withdrew when he came to get it. In the distance he could see his wife and observe his children growing day by day.

Leprosy was a devastating disease in many ways. For one, during those days, it was incurable. It literally was a death sentence. Sometimes the disease itself could remain dormant in the person for up to 15 years without ever being symptomatic. Then one day a spot becomes sore, tender to the touch. Then the spot changes pigment and it begins to get bigger. Knowing the adverse ramifications if it were in fact leprosy, we can suppose that many may have attempted to hide it as long as they could everyday living in fear that they would be found out and then ostracized and isolated, their worst fears coming true.

Everything about it was repulsive. Lepers were isolated from social life, cast out, unable to participate in society. They couldn’t buy or sell in the market. They couldn’t go to the synagogue or take pilgrimages during times of national festivals. They couldn’t engage in discussions among friends on some street corner or over a backyard barbeque. Everything that they had once known was now lost to them. They were treated with disdain, branded as an outcast, at times cruelly treated.

If that weren’t enough, everywhere they walked as someone approached them they were to call out ‘Unclean.’ ‘Unclean.’ What it really meant was ‘Avoid.’ ‘Avoid.’ If a leper refused to leave a town, the authorities could enforce it by threatening with 39 lashes.

According to scholar Alfred Edersheim in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, they had to remain at least 6’ from any healthy person or if the wind was blowing 150’ away for fear of the contagion. He continues by noting that one Rabbi would throw stones at anyone who had leprosy to force them to keep their distance. Another Rabbi reported that he

never ate an egg bought on a street where a leper walked. If you were a leper, it was assumed that you had committed some terrible sin.

If physical appearance wasn't devastating enough, anything the person touched became defiled and had to be burned. If he entered a room or a house, all its contents including the house had to be burned. If a leper touched an animal, the animal had to be killed.

Rabbis taught that leprosy was second only to touching a dead person as a way to become defiled. That this man had an advanced case of leprosy helps us understand the likelihood that he was in great despair.

His disease was unbearable.

His despair was unfathomable.

His devotion was unmistakable.

C. His Devotion Was Unmistakable

Jesus was visiting some unnamed town when a man approached Him, a man full of leprosy and on seeing Jesus we read that he fell with His face to the ground. Matthew and Mark both note that the leprous man fell on his knees before Jesus. His actions violated the Rabbinical law. For a moment let's assume that as he came into town he shouted the all too familiar word 'Unclean.' As people heard that ugly chant, people began to give way to him. If it were a western town, they would have ducked into buildings, or behind a water trough or rain barrel. Mothers would have grabbed their young children and turned their heads away and covered their eyes from gazing on the repulsive, disfigured man walking down the street.

We don't know if this man had ever seen Jesus before or knew what He looked like. Maybe he liked to listen to Jesus from a distance when Jesus was teaching nearby. Maybe from a distance he saw some of the miracles Jesus performed and began to wonder in the back of his mind if Jesus

could do the same for him. One day he got up the courage. They couldn't heap any more disgrace or shame on him than he already bore so he boldly marched into town. Whether he knew what Jesus looked like or not He knew who Jesus was because He would have been the only one standing in the street after everyone cleared out because they found out he was a leper.

John MacArthur states that the man was past fear, past shame, and heedless of danger to himself or others, literally having nothing to lose by his actions.

As he approached Jesus, he did what we do not find others doing, he bowed in reverence. We read in the KJV from **Matthew 8:2** **"there came a leper and worshipped Him."** In his actions, he understood something about Jesus that was divine. In that act he was coming to the only person who could help him and he bowed in worship of Him.

He gives us a good lesson in that no matter what we come to Jesus about, we should always come in worship and reverence. We should always remember into whose presence we come and it should begin with worship.

His devotion was unmistakable.

D. His Desire Was Unquestionable

"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

There was only one thing on his mind – he wanted to be cleansed of his leprosy and so he came to ask, but notice that the request was not conditional on the ability of Jesus, but rather on the willingness of Jesus. He was literally saying "Jesus, I know you can, will you?" **Do we have such confidence in the Lord's ability?**

We know Jesus can heal us of some illness.

We know Jesus can heal us of some injury.

We know Jesus can provide financially for us.

The question isn't whether or not He can. The question has to do with whether or not it is His will. He understood the power of Jesus. He was unclear of His willingness.

There is no mistaking the desire of the leper.

Now before we move on, I want you to notice something that is very important in his request. **What doesn't he ask for?** He doesn't ask to be healed. He asked to be made clean. That's important.

In **Isaiah 1:4-6** God, through the prophet is describing the sin of the nation to the disease of leprosy. Leprosy in the Old Testament was a picture of sin, of a person's uncleanness. Like leprosy, sin is deeper than the skin. Sin is more than the acts done, sin comes from the heart. Like leprosy, sin needs more than just surface measures to help. **Jeremiah 6:14** describes it as just putting a bandage on a wound.

This past week I attended a meeting of Livingston county leaders comprised of some educators, pastors, and community advocates addressing concerns about the youth in our county. While we came up with some common threads of ways to help youth who are marginalized, there was one element glaringly absent from the list. While it was addressed in a very broad stroke effort perhaps to appease the four pastors present, they suggested that faith of some kind plays an important part in the overall development of youth. We're all going up the same mountain with the same goal, just taking different paths, all the while missing the heart of the issue and the issue is sin and the sin nature. Until that is dealt with, you can throw all kinds of social programs and mentorships at kids to help them and that will only be a band aide on the deeper issue.

Like leprosy, sin spreads.

Like leprosy, sin defiles.

Like leprosy, sin isolates the person outside the camp separating us from God.

The man needed and wanted change, to be cleansed and he recognized that only the power and grace of God could cleanse him.

What leprosy does to the body, sin does to the soul. It is the perfect picture of what sin looks like. What leprosy looks like to man, sin looks like to God.

A person who had leprosy could not benefit from the sacrifice of the High Priest. The High Priest appeared once every year on behalf of the nation, offering a sacrifice for sin, but not for the leper. He was shut out from God. That's a picture of our sin. We are utterly shut out from God because of it. All we can do is shout out to God that we are unclean and then like the sinner in the temple, cry out **"if you will, you can make me clean."**

This verse shows us the condition of the man who was leprosy. It is a picture of the condition of man lost in the blackness of sin. If that were the end of the story, we would be lost in our own despair. It would be a truly hopeless condition. But along comes Jesus. We see in our text the compassion of the Messiah.

II. THE COMPASSION OF THE MESSIAH – v. 13-14

I mentioned earlier that Rabbis made a special effort to avoid contact with a leper for fear that they would become ceremonially unclean. What the man did violated the law, but what Jesus did also violated the law. Our text tells us that He touched the man. In that act we see the care given by Jesus.

A. The Care Given by Jesus – v.13a

I wonder what went through the mind of the man as Jesus reached out and touched him. I suspect there was no hesitation on the part of Jesus. I don't imagine that Jesus asked someone for a wet wipe or a bottle of hand sanitizer. He was not repulsed by the man. He didn't see what the man was; He saw what the man could become. **How long had it been**

since the leper felt the warmth of human touch?
How long had it been since he experienced
something other than cruelty, excommunication,
and contempt from the actions or lips of others?

Jesus touched Him, and just that touch must have
been an unforgettable experience. People go
absolutely crazy when they see a celebrity or get a
handshake or pat on the back or an autograph.
Jesus touched the man, and not just any man, he
was a social outcast, a leper.

'Twas battered and scarred,
And the auctioneer thought it
hardly worth his while
To waste his time on the old violin,
but he held it up with a smile.

"What am I bid, good people", he cried,
"Who starts the bidding for me?"
"One dollar, one dollar, Do I hear two?"
"Two dollars, who makes it three?"
"Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going for
three,"

But, No,
From the room far back a gray bearded man
Came forward and picked up the bow,
Then wiping the dust from the old violin
And tightening up the strings,
He played a melody, pure and sweet
As sweet as the angel sings.

The music ceased and the auctioneer
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said "What now am I bid for this old violin?"
As he held it aloft with its' bow.

"One thousand, one thousand, Do I hear two?"
"Two thousand, Who makes it three?"
"Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
Going and gone", said he.

The audience cheered,
But some of them cried,
"We just don't understand."
"What changed its' worth?"

Swift came the reply.
"The Touch of the Masters Hand."

"And many a man with life out of tune
All battered and bruised with hardship
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd
Much like that old violin

A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He is going once, he is going twice,
He is going and almost gone.

But the Master comes,
And the foolish crowd never can quite understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the Touch of the Masters' Hand.
Myra Brooks Welch

Have you been touched by the Master's hand?
Do you need a touch by the Master's hand?
The leper did, not knowing what to expect.

Note that Jesus' compassion did not end with just a
touch. His compassion went being caring for the
man. He also cleansed the man.

B. The Cleansing Given By Jesus – v. 13b

If the touch was welcoming to the leper, the words
of Jesus had to be incredibly freeing. We don't
know how many years prior to this the man had
heard those ominous words from the priest
diagnosing and condemning him with leprosy. He
now hears the words coming from the lips of the
only person he believed could cleanse him.
He had asked **"if You will, You can make me
clean."**

He heard Jesus say **"I am willing, be clean."**

Unlike Naaman, he didn't need to go to some river
and dip seven times for cleansing. Our text tells us
that immediately he was cleansed, made whole
again. That means it was instantaneous. As soon as
the words left the lips of Jesus, he was cleansed.
Today there is a cure for leprosy, but there is no

cure for the effects or damage that has been caused by it. Any visible signs of his leprosy were gone. If fingers were missing – they were restored. Skin pigment was restored. He was totally cleansed of the dreaded disease. There would be no lasting effects of it. It was as if he never had it.

And isn't it that way with sin? When we come to Jesus and ask Him to cleanse us from sin it is instantaneous, immediate, and without hesitation. Whether it is the first time we come to Him to forgive our sin or if we sinned this morning and seek forgiveness. He restores wholly. He doesn't look at us and say we're a hopeless case or a lost cause. He doesn't push us away or run and hide. When He touched the man, He had no fear of contracting leprosy. When He took our sin on Himself, He had no fear of becoming a sinner. He was not a sinner, He was our sin offering. He is willing to touch us and declare us to be clean.

Herbert Lockyer writes "The ugly, festering sores the leper bore in his body were the outward and visible tokens of sin in the soul, and in Christ's miracle of healing we have a symbol of His power to save from sin. No matter how vile a sinner may be, His touch still has its ancient power to cleanse."

The Mosaic Law gives a beautiful picture of the cleansing we receive from sin in the ceremony that was required when a person was announced cleansed by the priest. It's found in **Leviticus 14**.

John Phillips captures it for us with clarity. "At the heart of the elaborate procedure, two birds were taken. One of the birds was slain – the sinner can live only because Christ has died in his stead. The living bird was dipped in the blood of the slain bird. The leper also was sprinkled seven times with the blood to identify him with both the substitute and the shed blood. The living bird was then released to fly toward heaven, bearing with it the shed blood of the other bird. The blood on the ascending living bird bore witness to heaven that the leper was

cleansed. The blood on the leper himself bore witness to the fact that he personally appropriated the blood that secured his cleansing. The whole ritual, of which this ceremony was but a part, depicts how sinners find Christ a perfect Savior. He died for us and shed His precious blood to atone for our sin. After His death, burial, and resurrection, He ascended on high to bring the blood of atonement into heaven itself. Meanwhile, the sinner sprinkled with the blood is declared cleansed and fit to be brought into the fellowship of the people of God."

That is cleansing. That is forgiveness.

There can be no better cleansing than what has been given by Jesus.

There can be no other cleansing than what has been given by Jesus.

This story shows us that anyone who comes to Christ seeking to be cleansed will not be cast from His presence.

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

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When we come to Jesus with our need, there are no sweeter words spoken than "**I am willing, be clean.**" Cleansing was given by Jesus.

C. The Command Given By Jesus – v. 14

In His command Jesus showed respect for the Law. The Law required that the leper visit the priest who was to pronounce he was clean and able to reconnect with society. It required as I noted a moment ago certain rituals be performed. In essence He was telling the man to obey the Law.

A clean bill of health by the priest would serve as a testimony to them and to all others that Jesus

respected the law.

The priests had to either acknowledge that Jesus did it or indict themselves since they had examined the man and found him cleansed of leprosy. Cleansing would be a testimony of His power and confirmation of who He was.

He also commanded the man not to tell others because He did not want to be known only as a miracle worker. Too much emphasis on His power would only serve to further the desire of the people about political deliverance from Rome. Jesus did not want widespread acclaim. He came as a humble servant with the primary task to seek and save the lost.

The condition of the man

The compassion by the Messiah

The circulation among the multitudes

III. THE CIRCULATION AMONG THE MULTITUDES – v. 15-16

A. They Applauded Jesus – v. 15a

News like that couldn't be kept quiet very long. Maybe the cleansed leper shouted all the way to the synagogue. I'm clean. I'm clean.

Maybe his wife, if he was married, phoned all her friends about the good news.

If it were today, it would be all over facebook or twitter.

Maybe the priest spread the word. After all, they probably didn't get many leprosy cleansings. It would be a notable experience, especially in the way it was done.

I don't want you to miss this either with this physical cleansing of leprosy and especially not with spiritual cleansing from sin. Both are because of the grace of God. He did nothing but ask and Jesus did all the work. It's the same way with our

sin and salvation. We ask to be cleansed and Jesus responds "I will, be cleansed." He did all the work.

Word spread like a wild fire. In spite of Jesus' efforts to keep it quiet, word got around quickly. So the multitudes sought after Him.

B. They Appealed to Jesus – v. 15b

They came to Him for two reasons.

1. To hear Him teach.
2. To be healed by His touch.

Unfortunately they missed the significance of the cleansing. It was symbolic of the cleansing He offers from sin. They only wanted healing from their physical diseases and injuries. They wanted Him only for His healing power. They appealed to Him that they too might be healed.

C. Their Absence From Jesus – v. 16

As we have noted before, Jesus needed time to be refreshed in His own spirit from the demands of ministry. He sought out time to be alone and absent from the multitudes, not to avoid them but to connect with the Father, to strengthen His spirit for the work He was doing, and to rest.

The multitudes may look at you and consider your former life and remember that you were once an outcast, worth nothing in their opinion. But the master comes along and recognizing your potential touches you and cleans you up. He sees your true worth, He sees what you can become by His touch, and His touch now makes you priceless.

What kind of touch do you need today from Him?
Come to Him and ask if He is willing.