

Priorities of the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] So this is the thing about the man with leprosy. And I'd like to look at it in four stages.

! It's a strong word.

So it's just one word, so not filled with anything. It's just sort of compassionated. Or it's actually a word to do with that part of your stomach, around that area.

And in those days they wouldn't have had a hugely detailed knowledge of anatomy. But when you feel something, in biblical terms, that's where you feel it, in the gut.

And I heard it translated gut-wrenching compassion. Jesus was, if we say gutted, we usually mean disappointed, don't we?

[1 : 14] But he felt in his guts compassion. It's a very strong emotional word. And it would be a great mistake to think that Jesus was devoid of compassion.

And here he has this strong... Sorry, that Jesus was devoid of emotion. And here's a strong insight into his emotional makeup.

He's filled with compassion. So there's that word. And there's another word in verse 40... Sorry, let me go back to the filled with compassion. Apparently, in some of the texts, they say filled with anger.

Now, the way texts, copies of the scriptures have been passed down through the generations is a whole subject in itself. But the fact that some of the copyists had the idea that anger was what was said there, you almost wonder whether that was the original and the other people thought, well, anger is such a surprising thing.

Perhaps what they really meant was compassion. But so I only say that some of the texts say there was anger there. And anger, I would think, at the fact that this world contains things like leprosy and cripples people like the way leprosy does.

[2 : 43] And there's this very strong reaction from Jesus. So that's one emotional word. And then in verse 43, it doesn't come across very well in English.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning. There's a word there, which I've got somewhere in my pieces of paper.

If I said snorting with anger, it would be quite near the mark. It's a word which comes from what horses do when they sort of snort.

And in this case, it's Jesus really snorting with anger. And this is when he's sending the chap away. He's really, don't you dare. Something like that. So there's strong emotion in this little story, which perhaps isn't immediately obvious when you read it quickly.

[3 : 50] And let me say another introductory thing. No, I think that was all the introduction. So there's some emotions coming up. So let's hope that we can appreciate what's going on.

So stage one, the leper comes. A man with leprosy came to Jesus, begged him on his knees. And the thing I would like to say about leprosy is it's certainly a disease.

In those days, they didn't have such clear categories of diseases. There would be a number of skin diseases that would be referred to as leprosy.

And in the Old Testament, there's a number of things that were meant to be put into operation with somebody with leprosy. And one of them would be that you wouldn't touch this person.

So it is a disease, but in particular, the Old Testament provision says that this makes somebody unclean.

[4 : 51] So not just unclean in the way that we would think, you know, wash your hands, your hands are not clean, clean them. But unclean in the spiritual sense that, you know, that some foods were unclean or the Gentiles were unclean.

It's something that puts this person out of touch with God, puts him beyond a barrier. He's out of the place of admission to the things of God.

He's an unclean person. So not only does it put him at a distance from God, but it puts him from a distance from other people. So he wouldn't be able to sit here with us because he's unclean.

He would have to go and stand by himself at a certain distance or in a certain place. He would, he's isolated, not only theologically, but socially.

Oh, a terrible thing, terrible situation for somebody to be in. So this is what is meant by leprosy. And this is why he says, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

[5 : 59] You can remove all of that stigma, all of that isolation, all of that pushed away-ness. And also, you can make my skin better.

So I observe what is being discussed here is the range of Jesus' power. He can sort out something on this level.

And the leper is to be commended as he approaches Jesus. And he says, number two, the leper's faith. If you are willing, you can make me clean.

So you notice that there's no doubt about Jesus' ability. He doesn't come to Jesus and say, I'd like to inquire whether this is something you can possibly do.

That is completely sorted out in this man's mind. He can certainly do this.

[7 : 04] From what I've seen of him, from what I've seen of his authority and his power, no doubt that he can make me clean. It's a great thing for us to have a high view of what Jesus can do.

The thing that he's not sure about, whether it is within Jesus' policy, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

But are you willing? Is it the sort of thing you are prepared to do? Because in the context of it, we've got the idea that Jesus is not in the business of just wholesale, curing everybody and everything.

That's the main thing that he's come to do. And we've already got the sense that Jesus has another priority. So the leper is not saying a silly thing.

Is it still something you're prepared to do, Lord? Because if you are willing, you can make me clean. And I think we should learn from the leper's faith that he has this high view of Jesus' ability.

[8 : 18] Lord, if it was your policy, you would have no problem in making every single person that went down London Road stop at the book table and say, tell me the way of salvation.

There's no problem in Jesus' power to do that. It's simply a matter of whether that's part of his policy. Think of whatever issue it is in your life that you think, that's something I would be concerned about.

And then match that up against the statement. The Lord Jesus would have no problem power-wise in sorting that out, would he?

He'd have no problem power-wise. It's a question of whether it's part of his policy. Is it his policy to do things like that? So I'm just trying to think of an example that isn't facetious.

But you might say, oh, the thing that's really bothering me is, you know, I'm left-handed when I should be right-handed. Now, there'd be no problem for Jesus to do that, to change that.

[9 : 33] But is it his policy? Does he have a policy on left-handedness and right-handedness? And I think if you asked him, he'd say, actually, I don't really think that there's any particular advantage in you being right-handed or left-handed.

And I made you that way, and I'm going to keep you the same way as I made you. Do you see what I mean? That's a sort of very trivial example. But there's no... The question that the leper raises is not of his power, but whether it's his policy.

And I think that's something for us to bear in mind. So that was number two. Let's see what happens for stage number three. So what does Jesus do? He says, I am willing as to my will.

Yes, I am willing. And interestingly, it says, filled with compassion.

Really in his gut saying, I do care. I am willing. And he reaches out his hand and touches the man.

[10 : 44] You'd think Mark needn't bother saying both of those things. But he does say both of those things. He reaches out his hand and he touches the man and he says, be clean.

And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed is what it should say there.

But I'm interested in how Jesus did this. He speaks a word, doesn't he? And we know that Jesus has done many things by word.

But interestingly, he reaches out. Do you notice this? And touches the man. I think that's significant. Because a leper, one of the things that a leper must surely lack in his life is anybody touching him.

Because of this isolation. So no hugs and no cuddles. No handshakes. No smacks on the back. No, nothing like that.

[11:47] If you think of how important those things are to us from time to time. And the man would not have had that as I understand it. But Jesus goes, makes a point of reaching out and touching him.

And I'm speculating. Is that the first time anybody's touched him on the shoulder? Since he was a little boy. But Jesus reaches out and touches him.

And says, I am willing. Be clean. And also thinking about the way uncleanness works.

For most people. Well, I think perhaps I ought to say for everybody except Jesus. To touch the leper would transmit the uncleanness of the leper to the person doing the touching.

You'd catch what he had. So if he had the Ebola virus, you would catch it from him. And he has uncleanness. And if you touch him, you catch it from him.

[12:49] But in this case, notice what happens. That Jesus doesn't catch uncleanness by touching the leper. But the leper catches Jesus' cleanness through being touched by Jesus.

It's quite a remarkable thing, isn't it? I suppose it tells us there's something about the respective powers of those two forces. It isn't that the uncleanness has the sort of pressure to whoosh into Jesus.

So much that Jesus' cleanness and goodness and wholesomeness has the pressure to push itself into the unclean man. And that seems to me quite a thing.

And notice too, that it's immediately. Now I know that lots of things have happened immediately. But this is one of them. Immediately the leprosy left him.

It ran away. And he was cleansed. That's really a striking picture, isn't it? So here comes the man.

Come to Jesus, perhaps with disfigurement.

[13:55] Perhaps with sores, skin problems. And he kneels before Jesus. Jesus touches him. And immediately, it's all gone.

Immediately, it's all gone. And he is now admissible into meeting people and sitting with people and having coffee with people. You can see.

Immediately, he was cleansed. So quite something, isn't it? Now, let's do number four. This is where the angry bit comes in.

Now, Jesus sent him away is a strong word. It's the same word that's used about the Holy Spirit. Verse 12.

Sending Jesus into the desert. It's the same word of Jesus sending out evil spirits.

[14:56] And I haven't made a notice to exactly where it's used. It's ekballo. Ek means out. And ballo. And I'm not sure about this. Because that's the problem of having an amateur Greek speaker commenting on this.

And it certainly reminds me of the word for ball, ekballo. I don't know. Ballo means to throw, like ballistics. So it's like to kick out. If you think of kicking out a football.

So it's strange that the Holy Spirit kicks Jesus out into the desert. But it is ekballo there. I can certainly imagine Jesus kicking out the evil spirits. And Jesus kicks out the leper.

And he does it with this snorting anger. Jesus kicked him out at once with an angry, strong, stern warning.

And I think, this is what I think. That if we were to say something like, Jesus, with snorting anger, said, And don't you dare tell anyone what's just happened.

[16:16] Because that's what he says. Don't see that you don't tell this to anyone. You came to me. You asked me for this blessing. You knew there was a question mark over what my policy was.

And for you, I have definitely healed you, cured you. You know there's an issue about this. Because you mentioned it right at the beginning. And I've done this for you.

Now, don't you dare tell a single soul about this. Except to go down to Jerusalem. So book yourself on the bus. Get yourself down to Jerusalem.

It's quite a long way. And go and do all the stuff that's written in Leviticus chapter 14, I think it is. Go and do all that stuff as a testimony to them.

Do, that's what I want you to do. That's the way I want you to do it. And don't you dare do anything different. It doesn't quite come across if you read it quickly, does it?

[17:16] But it is a strong, strong statement. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning, seeing that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices

that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them.

So you get the point of that. The Old Testament had provisions, things that they were supposed to do. It is in Leviticus chapter 14. Now you might like to turn to Leviticus chapter 14.

You might like to turn to it. Leviticus chapter 14. You might like to turn to it, but you probably don't want to read it. Because look at the length of it.

These are all the provisions for somebody who is cleansed of an infectious skin disease, of which leprosy would be the way of expressing it.

And there's a whole set of different sacrifices to be offered and a whole set of things to do.

[18 : 20] It would have taken him quite a while if he'd gone through it all as he was told to. And he was told to. And he was told to go to the priest.

And it's pretty certain that that would have involved him going to Jerusalem. And certainly offering the sacrifices. I don't think he could have done them anywhere else other than Jerusalem.

And that's what Jesus told him to do. And it was using the provisions of the Jewish system, Jewish ceremony system, to say, I've been cleansed.

Something has happened to bring this about. I don't think there would have been many people who turned up at the temple in Jerusalem and said, I've been cleansed from leprosy. Please, can we do what it says in Leviticus chapter 14?

I'm not saying that God never ever did that for anybody else under any circumstances. But it would have been quite something for the priest. So he'd say, really? What did you say?

[19 : 21] Well, you look fine to me. What, just the other week? Really? Right. Well, we'll have to see what we have to do. I don't know. Is it Leviticus?

No. 14, is it? Oh, right. Okay. Haven't done this for quite a while. Do you see what I mean? And it would be a testimony. They'd really notice it. But did he do it?

Well, we're not sure whether he did do it. My impression is that he didn't. Because it says in verse 45, instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.

Which brings us to the fifth thing, the leper's disobedience. He heralded. He preached. He went and told everybody.

Now, I think we probably have a bit of a problem reading this. Because for us, we're not under orders to be quiet. We're under orders to go into all nations and make disciples and tell people.

[20 : 22] And our problem is that we feel a little bit embarrassed about whether we're going to speak up or not. But that's not the situation that this man was in.

He was told, for good reasons, don't tell anybody. But he didn't do what he was told.

And as a result, Jesus' scope was limited. And as I was reading the commentaries, they say, and you may or may not agree with them, that as we move on now through Mark's Gospel, Jesus has two problems facing him.

One is the opposition of people who hate him. And the other is the popularity of people who love him but don't get the right idea. And he's got these two pressures on him.

And I don't know whether we can lay both of them at the feet of the leper and say, you silly man. If you'd done what you were told, then both of those problems would have been put back.

[21 : 31] I don't know whether we can be as hard on him as that. But certainly the text says, you silly man. If you had kept quiet like you were supposed to, Jesus would have had more opportunity to minister in those towns and cities.

But he couldn't. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, but stayed outside in lonely places. Well, it didn't stop the work of God going on.

Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. So, the end of that story, I think, is a bit of a puzzle really, isn't it? And I never really thought about this and I haven't really got much to offer on it.

But here's somebody who's been blessed. But, I think with good motives, doesn't do what they're supposed to do with the blessing.

Doesn't mean Jesus didn't bless them. It doesn't mean Jesus won't do things for people that he knows are going to not make the best of it.

[22 : 48] But, it's a strange one, isn't it? He's blessed and yet he's disobedient. And I would say that that is an example to avoid.

Do you agree with me? That if we've been blessed, the respectful thing to do is to take the blessing and be obedient with it.

And perhaps, it's something for us to apologise to the Lord for. If we've been blessed and yet taken that blessing and not used it the way we were supposed to.
I think perhaps squandered would be too negative a word. Let's sing as we close.
Let's sing as we close.