

Able and Willing

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: 16 March 2025

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] As you think back over your life, do you remember a time when you felt utterly desperate, totally powerless to bring the change that you longed for?

This morning as we continue on with the story of Jesus, we're going to hear the story of a man who was in that place. Sometime after Jesus had begun to call his disciples to follow him, he came to a town and while Jesus was in this town, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.

Luke describes the condition of this man with just a few words. He was covered with leprosy. Now the word that's used here for leprosy was a broad term that included various kinds of skin diseases back then.

Most of the time when we hear that word, our minds go immediately to Hansen's disease. And if you know anything about Hansen's disease, it's a chronic infectious disease caused by certain variety of bacteria.

It primarily affects the skin, peripheral nerves, upper respiratory tract, and eyes. And left untreated, Hansen's disease can do irreparable damage to a person's body.

[1 : 38] Just a few pictures taken from an online encyclopedia. According to some of the sources I found online, the disease itself actually doesn't directly cause all the visible damage.

Rather, it causes nerve damage, which prevents people from feeling sensations and pain, which then leads to subsequent injuries and infections and exposures that are responsible for the deformities and the damage that you can see in the skin.

But as I said a moment ago, the word used here by Luke was commonly used to describe various kinds of serious skin diseases. So Hansen's disease may have been what this man had, but there are also a number of other serious chronic skin diseases that are possibilities as well.

Some of them are more contagious than others. From a medical standpoint today, we don't know exactly which skin disease he had, but we do notice the description.

He was covered with leprosy. Whatever this man had, it was all over his body, and it was obvious. It was noticeable.

[2 : 59] Most of us today can't even begin to imagine what this must have been like for this man. But one thing is certain. It would have led to him being very lonely, isolated, and ostracized by nearly everyone.

First, there's the very visible difference of his appearance to everyone else. Whether it was scales or open sores or deformity or discoloration, these things are obvious and noticeable.

And it's common for people when they see others who have that kind of a thing going on to just have this gut reaction, to turn away, to look away, to move away from people who appear to be infected with a skin disease like this.

Second, there is concern by many that they might become infected should they have too close a contact with a person that has this obvious skin disease. Is it contagious?

Will it spread to me? And then finally, on top of all that, we read back in the Old Testament about how God had given specific instructions about what they were to do when people contracted various kinds of skin diseases.

[4 : 20] They were to be examined by the priest. They were then pronounced ceremonially unclean. And they were put into quarantine outside the camp. After a while, they could be checked on to see if what they had was healed.

But if it was determined that they had a chronic skin disease, something that would just be ongoing, they were considered unclean for as long as they had the condition.

They were to wear torn clothes, cover the lower part of their face, and cry out, unclean, to keep people away from them.

They were to live alone outside the camp. It's difficult for us today even to imagine what this would have been like for people back then. According to the regulations that God gave for his tabernacle and temple, you were not permitted to come worship at the temple if you were unclean.

And in the case of lifelong chronic skin diseases like this, you were not permitted to live among people at all. And so people with chronic skin diseases, they often ended up in small leper colonies where they lived together, shut out from society.

[5 : 42] Now some have wondered why God gave such a law about uncleanness and cleanness in this case. This would have basically severed a person completely from all worship and cut off one of the key components of having a relationship with God in those days, which was participation in the temple and the festivals.

And then to add to that, being forced to live alone as an outcast. And the answer to this is somewhat complicated. Some have suggested that back then, God almost always gave diseases like this to people as punishment for wickedness.

Some would argue that if people were truly sorry and repentant for their sins after contracting a disease like this, that God would always heal them of a disease like this.

So some suggested this was the normal way that God related to his people under that old covenant law given through Moses in the ancient times of Israel. And it is true that God sometimes used plagues and sicknesses and sicknesses in the Bible as punishment for wickedness.

It's also true that God provided complete healing and recovery when wicked men humbled themselves before him who had become sick with things like this.

[7 : 09] But I'm not sure that it's as simple as people with chronic skin diseases always being guilty and under God's punishment. still you can imagine how this would have affected the attitude of the healthy people in the community towards people with these kinds of conditions.

It was common for them to look down upon people with chronic sicknesses to think of them as people who are just rotten sinners suffering God's judgment.

So imagine at least as far as we can what it would have been like for this man who was covered with leprosy.

What a hard life to watch people always turning their faces away in disgust to see parents grabbing their children and pulling them away to see that look of fear in the eyes of people and to have to announce your uncleanness whenever you approached.

Think about the reality that everyone who had this kind of a sickness every one of them had a mother and father perhaps siblings a family from whom they were cut off and separated.

[8 : 51] One of my favorite things to do every single day is to just pick up my baby boy Joseph and hug him tight and kiss his chubby little cheeks and see his smiles and his laughs but for the leper that closeness with family was lost forever.

You didn't dare get close to the people living in the colonies. You didn't dare touch them. Can you imagine going years without the touch of your family without the touch of another human being? We thought the COVID regulations were bad and we were absolutely done with them by the end of what two years but imagine being cut off from your family and friends for the rest of your life and for lepers it wasn't controversial back then.

It was firmly embedded in society unclean stay away don't even let them get near you. so this man covered with leprosy comes to Jesus when he saw Jesus he fell with his face to the ground and begged him Lord if you are willing you can make me clean do you see the desperation in this man? he fell with his face to the ground before Jesus he humbled himself as low as a person can go face down probably not even making eye contact with Jesus the smell of the dirt in his nostrils and he begged Jesus says he begged he pleaded with him do you see his desperation?

[10 : 44] he says Lord if you are willing you can make me clean this is amazing somehow word has traveled the news has spread and this man has been hearing about how Jesus has been healing people of all kinds of sicknesses illnesses diseases and at some point after hearing about this enough this man has come to the conclusion not that Jesus might be able to heal him but that Jesus does have the power to heal him look carefully at his words if you are willing you can you are able to make me clean it's not a question in his mind of whether Jesus has the ability to do it it's a question in his mind of whether Jesus is willing to do it if you are willing do you want to we don't know what the man was thinking could he have been wondering about whether God really had been punishing him with this condition could he have wrestled so deeply with the question of why God had allowed this to happen to him that he doubted the kindness and mercy of God we don't

know what's amazing though is that he believes Jesus is able to cure his incurable condition despite having never seen or witnessed a healing or a miracle of Jesus before but is he willing will he care about me this man has probably known an abundance of cruelty from others it's probably become the normal scorn derision it's what he expects from virtually everybody

Lord if you are willing you can make me clean Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man I imagine that at this moment any bystanders and Jesus disciples who were probably all keeping a good distance themselves I imagine that they all gasped in this moment Jesus just touched a leper he just touched an unclean man what does this mean does that mean that he's unclean too do we need to keep our distance now from him until he's gone through the purification rites who knows what they were thinking but can you imagine what this moment must have felt like for this man to watch

Jesus reach out his hand toward him and touch him something nobody had done for a long time I am willing Jesus said be clean and immediately the leprosy left him what must those words have meant to the man I am willing I want to do this for you and then this mysteriously authoritative command be clean in the original language this was written in it's just one word Jesus speaks one word and immediately the leprosy left him we're talking instant visible skin transformation all over his body this is when I imagine all the bystanders and Jesus disciples gasping twice as loud as the first time did you see that look his skin is changing verse 14 then Jesus ordered him don't tell anyone but go show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that

Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them there's all kinds of ideas here about what as a testimony to them means was it to prove that he was clean so that he could regain acceptance into society was it to testify to them that Jesus does indeed have the power to heal the sick think about the bystanders for a moment if this man was unclean and Jesus just said be clean and now he's healed does that mean that Jesus has the power to actually make people clean in relation to God he did that he I mean usually in this situation it's the priest who pronounces a person clean and it has to be after examining the man to confirm that he no longer has the skin disease but in this case it's almost as if Jesus did even more than the priest could do he didn't just pronounce the man clean he made him clean who knows what the bystanders were thinking what about you Jesus were you not made unclean by touching him but now he's clean this is how it typically worked if you did something that made you unclean or if you had close contact with someone else who was unclean it made you unclean but after witnessing this it makes you wonder maybe it's the opposite with Jesus maybe he is the only one who truly has the power of God to cleanse others that when he touches them they become clean before God acceptable before God Jesus told the man not to tell anyone he's already being swarmed by people daily and news of these healings just adds fuel to the fire in the gospel of Mark we're actually told that he doesn't listen to Jesus he goes out and he starts telling everybody freely the news and the result of this is that

[17 : 49] Jesus is not even able to enter a town openly anymore because of all the crowds that are coming to him imagine him trying to make his way! through the streets yet the news about him spread all the more so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses but Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed with the constant time spent with people all day every day you can imagine how Jesus would have needed and cherished moments of solitude time alone with the father if even Jesus needed that and sought that out so should we if Jesus could find time in an even busier schedule than we have to be with God and to pray so can we it might require some intentionality it might require some creativity but we need to find the lonely places and the lonely times for prayer well what are we to take from all this

I hope that you are in awe at the power of God immediate visible healing of a chronic skin disease Jesus accomplishes this with just a word he changed this whole man's life with just one word he spoke and the man's flesh was made new right in front of their eyes in an instant it demonstrates the power of God as we've been talking about in this series through Luke it demonstrates also the authority that Jesus has over the stuff of nature over the bacteria over the viruses things that would cause permanent damage to this man's body it would seem that the body of the man itself responds to Jesus word and instantly begins to heal this is amazing but perhaps the thing that touches me most in all of this is how this particular healing demonstrates the kindness and compassion of Jesus I love how he reaches out and touches the untouchable man I love what he says to him he proves that yes God really does care for you I am willing I see I know what you've been living through up until now and I desire to remedy it in Mark's gospel it says that Jesus was deeply moved

by the plea of this man deeply moved do you know that our suffering moves the compassionate heart of God the compassionate heart of Jesus maybe there's something going on in your life today which has you feeling desperate something you feel like you're not in control of I can't tell you that this passage is a guarantee that

God will instantly remedy whatever it is that you're facing with a miracle I don't think the point of this is that God will always heal that he will always do the miracle we ask for but I can tell you that this passage shows us what we should do when we're desperate with anything in our lives and that's to come to Jesus to fall on our knees before him to humble ourselves before him and to call out to him in prayer for help believing that he does have the power to fix whatever it is that's going on in our lives and one way or another if not immediately then eventually Jesus will answer and he will deliver his people from everything that afflicts us let's look ahead for a minute to what Jesus revealed about what's coming at the very end for all who believe in his name this is from the book of revelation at the very end of the

Bible chapter 21 verse 3 and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying look God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God he will wipe every tear from their eyes there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away he who is seated on the throne said I am making everything new write this down for these words are trustworthy and true bring your desperation to Jesus bring your hopelessness to Jesus cast your cares upon him he has promised to deliver us from all of our troubles if not our way then his way and if not now then soon when he returns we might be tempted at times when things are tough to wonder does

[24 : 02] God really care about me is he really kind he is see his hand reaching out to touch the leper hear his words I am willing let's pray Lord Jesus thank you for letting us see into what happened in that moment precious moment day when that man's life was turned upside down Lord I thank you that you desire to do a similar kind of working in all of our lives to turn our lives upside down but sometimes you allow us to go through things so that we come face to face with you so that we can see your care your love for us your deep love for us even in the hard things

Lord we can say blessed be your name your design for allowing them is good draw us near we pray we bring our desperation to you we lay it at your feet and we ask for you to work with power in all of those situations in our lives now pray this in your name amen