

PM Mark 1:40-45 Jesus Cleanses a Leper

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Preacher: Mr William Kenyon

[0 : 00] Leviticus chapter 13. That can be found on page 108 of the Church Bibles. So we'll read from verse 9 of Leviticus 13, and we'll read down to verse 17, and then we'll read a section nearer the end from verses 45 to 46.

Our theme tonight, as you'll have seen from the notice sheet, is the cleansing of the leper. And here we see in chapter 13 of Leviticus, the Old Testament ceremonial law and the civil law for how to treat the disease of leprosy.

From verse 9 of chapter 13. When a man is afflicted with a leprosy disease, he shall be brought to the priest. And the priest shall look, and if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and there is raw flesh in the swelling, it is a chronic leprosy disease in the skin of his body.

And the priest shall pronounce him unclean. He shall not shut him up, for he is unclean. And if the leprosy disease breaks out in the skin, so that the leprosy disease covers all the skin of the diseased person, from head to foot, so far as the priest can see, then the priest shall look, and if the leprosy disease has covered all his body, he shall pronounce him clean of the disease.

It has all turned white, and he is clean. But when raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean.

[2 : 04] And the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him unclean. Raw flesh is unclean, for it is a leprosy disease. But if the raw flesh recovers and turns white again, then he shall come to the priest, and the priest shall examine him.

And if the disease has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce the diseased person clean. He is clean. And then down to verse 45 and 46.

The leprosy person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose.

And he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, Unclean! Unclean! He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean.

He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside of the camp. Amen. Amen. The ending of God's word. We'll sing a Mark chapter 1.

[3 : 09] Mark chapter 1, from verses 40 to 45. And that can be found on page 1009 of the Church Bibles. This will be our text for the evening.

Mark chapter 1.

I am going to read. And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once.

And said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded for a proof to them.

But he went out and began to talk freely about it and spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places and people were coming to him from every quarter.

[4 : 35] Amen. I could ask you to turn back to Mark chapter 1.

Mark chapter 1. And as I said before we'll be considering the verses 40 to the end of the chapter.

Now if I was to ask you who in the Bible was cleansed of leprosy I wonder who would come to mind first.

I'm sure Naaman would be top of the list. It certainly was in my mind. The commander of the army of Syria from 2 Kings 5. He suffered from the disease but there was a little servant girl from Israel who instructed him to go and see Elisha.

And when he went to see Elisha he was instructed to bathe seven times in the Jordan and being the proud man that he was, the captain of the Syrian guard he thought he was above that but eventually he did it anyway.

And in that the Lord healed him from his disease of leprosy. And we read there in 2 Kings 5 that his flesh was restored to that of a little child.

[5 : 53] Now when we come to the Gospels in the New Testament there are two occasions where Jesus heals of leprosy. This one's the first one, the healing of the one man.

But then there is a second one. That is in Luke 17 where Jesus heals ten lepers. And we remember from that account particularly that there was sadly only one returned to say thank you.

Aside from that in the New Testament we do have a man called Simon the leper. Now he was, Jesus went to his home in Bethany. He was invited there to have a meal.

And when Jesus was eating with him there was a lady who anointed Jesus with the nard. And we can imagine that from that Simon obviously used to be a leper and no longer was leprosy.

As throwing a dinner party as a leper I don't think you would get many returns for your invites. I don't think many guests would show up. So it's commonly held that Jesus also healed Simon too.

[6 : 56] But there were no doubt many more healings. Not all of Jesus' miracles were recorded in the Gospels as we learnt this morning from John. But we do read in Luke 7 that when John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus Jesus told them to go back to John and tell them what you have seen and heard that the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them.

So for our consideration this evening we do have this very personal and it is really quite a moving account of this one man being healed. So just as an outline for the sermon this evening we'll start with quite a long introduction to leprosy in the first century.

Just so we get an idea of what the disease is and what it meant. And then when we come to the passage we'll see our first point being the leper's plea from verse 40. Our second point is the willing saviour in verses 41 to 42.

Our third point is the two commands that Jesus gives this man. That is in verse 43 and 44. And then the fourth point, the command disobeyed.

That's from verse 45. So to start off, leprosy in the first century. Leprosy was a very frightening and a shameful disease.

[8 : 21] It was far more common in Bible times than it is today. It seems to thrive in a more hot climate as well, in a hot dry climate. It was in the northern hemisphere, though there have been cases.

The further north you go, the less prevalent it is. But especially today, due to medical advancements, particularly in the 1980s, not that long ago really, it was in 1982 that a cure was found for leprosy.

So treatment today is much easier. But there are still lepers in certain parts of the world. The disease starts in a very small and a mild way. And gradually it spreads throughout the whole body and often ends in death.

One early symptom is a faint rash. And it's usually found on the forehead or on the cheek. And that then spreads further down the neck. And one of the things the disease does is it attacks the nerves that are just underneath the skin.

And in doing so, it blocks up the sweat pores. And so the skin then swells up and it dries up. And it's known for becoming white.

[9 : 31] And then skin infections like boils and blistering can occur. Your eyelashes and then your eyebrows will fall out and your hair starts to fall out. But then one of the most common and noticeable causes is you lose feelings in your fingers and in your toes.

They all start to go numb. And then eventually all your extremities rot away. Like even your ears, your nose and your feet. And your face becomes disfigured. It can be said someone with leprosy, severe leprosy, even starts to resemble more of a lion than they do a man.

Just because the face just moulds into itself. Perhaps the only mercy is for a disease is that it's not really painful because of the numbing effect. Like many diseases are.

You can carry on functioning pretty much as normal. For a time. But the numbing effect is in itself a problem because you're very, very prone to injury.

I was listening to John MacArthur and he recalls a story of a young boy who was, he saw a man who was struggling to get into a store cupboard. And the key was jammed in the lock and the man couldn't get anywhere with it.

[10:41] So this little ten year old boy said, here I'll help. And he turned the key, no problem. But then they saw blood on the floor and he'd ripped his finger right to the bone. But he didn't even know because the boy was leprous.

So that is one of the main problems which causes issues with a leprous person that they don't feel injuries. You can get burnt. You could have animals like rats eating at you and you wouldn't even know about it.

Then as the disease progresses, it goes deep down into your tendons. It infects your internal organs. It gets into your eyes. And a common effect is you go blind. And then all of a sudden the body just falls apart.

It's been likened to sort of like cutting strings on a puppet. Everything fails all at once. And that is quite often the tragic end of a leper. There are also social sides to the disease because it is highly contagious.

We read in Leviticus that you become officially unclean if you have leprosy. So you would have to leave your family and friends. You couldn't touch anyone and nobody would be allowed to touch you.

[11:49] Even if you touched a piece of cloth, that would be unclean. If you touched a rock on the side of the road which somebody else might sit on, the rock would become unclean. You couldn't drink from a stream that someone else might drink from or a well.

You wouldn't even be allowed inside of a walled city. The only people you could hang out with were other lepers like yourself. You would have to wear the torn clothes as we read in Leviticus.

You would have to have a covering over your top lip. And everywhere you went you would have to shout out, unclean, unclean. And so those were the very strict rules to stop the spread of the disease in first century Israel and even before.

But perhaps most tragic of all is you were not allowed to enter God's house for worship. The temple was off limits to you. And it kind of takes us back.

It just reminded me as soon as we were doing this to the social distancing we had to do a couple of years ago. And how tragic that was. But it really was a walk in the park when you consider the life of a leper.

[12:52] And then one final shameful part of being a leper. If all that wasn't bad enough of itself. It was quite often seen as a judgment from God. Because the Lord did use leprosy occasionally as a punishment.

We remember from Numbers 12 that Miriam was struck with leprosy when she spoke out against her brother Moses. And the Lord used leprosy as a judgment for her. But then I think perhaps the most well known case is the case of proud King Uzziah from 2 Chronicles.

He was so proud that he thought it best that he could take upon himself the censer and burn incense inside the temple. A job that only a priest was allowed to do.

And because he did it while he still had the censer in his hand. The Lord struck him with leprosy straight away in the forehead. And he had leprosy until the day of his death. Now all this is very sad. And you may be thinking well I'm glad I don't have that. And we should be glad that none of us do. And that there's things going forward that the disease is becoming less and less prevalent.

[14:00] But the fact is all of us really suffer from a disease far worse than leprosy. We have a spiritual disease. The disease that mirrors leprosy in every way.

A disease that not only ends in death but ends in death and judgment in hell. We have the disease of sin. And leprosy can be viewed as an allergy or as a picture of sin.

And we see this in scripture. If you turn with me to Isaiah chapter 1. Isaiah chapter 1 reading from verse 4. Isaiah chapter 1.

Isaiah chapter 1 reading from verse 4. This is talking about the sin of the nation. Our sinful nation. A people laden with iniquity. Offspring of evildoers.

Children who deal corruptly. They have forsaken the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down?

[15:12] Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick. And the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head.

There is no soundness in it. But bruises and sores. And raw wounds. They are pressed out or bound up.

They are not pressed out or bound up. Or soften with oil. So there we see a very clear picture. We see the blistering. We see being unclean from the top of the head to the sole of the foot.

And we see other parallels to leprosy. We see leprosy and sin right alongside each other. Just listen to how these various texts describe sin. And then think of it.

How it corresponds to leprosy. We read in Isaiah 64.6. That we have all become like one who is unclean. And all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

[16:12] And then we see the numbing effect of sin. Just like the numbing effect of leprosy. We don't feel our true wickedness of sin as we should. Some sins we get so used to that our consciences are not even sensitive to them.

And we don't even detect it. We read in Ephesians 4.18 and 19. Talking of unbelievers. They are darkened in their understanding. Alienated from the life of God.

Because of their ignorance that is in them. Due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous. They have given themselves up to sensuality. Greedy.

And to practice every kind of impurity. We see another parallel in the fact that sin also ruins our personal relationships. As well as our relationships with God.

Isaiah 59 verse 2 reads. And then we see that the symptoms may start small.

[17:20] But lead to death. James 1.14 and 15. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin.

And sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. But then more positively we have the cure. So we see the leper cured by Christ.

We see that there is a cure for sin in Luke 5. Jesus says. Those who are well have no need of a physician. But those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous.

But sinners to repentance. And I'm sure there are many more similarities. We could go through. Perhaps loads more in the Bible. But these are just a few. So with all that in mind.

Let's study this passage together. And see for ourselves. That if we can even see ourselves in this desperate man. As he comes to Christ. And in that way we will find much application for ourselves.

[18:21] And along the way we will see many pictures of the gospel. Coming out of this passage. So let's start in verse 40. The leper's plea. We see the leper.

He is the one who initiates it. He approaches Christ. Now we know that the leprosy must have been obvious. Because in Luke's account. It says that he is full of leprosy.

So the disfigurement and the skin and the boils must have been so easy to see. So his behaviour here is actually very inappropriate. From what we've learnt so far about how to treat leprosy.

His condition meant that he wasn't to approach anyone. But the truth is he doesn't even care. He just is so desperate he wants the healing. He knows that the only way he's going to get it is from Christ.

So he's bold by doing this. He's bold by putting himself forward. But notice at the same time he is also humble. Look at his posture. He's there kneeling.

[19:21] That is a sign of submission. And then look at his words. He says, See he knows Jesus can do it.

But he wonders will he do it. He doesn't doubt Jesus power and ability. Jesus is the only one. He knows who can save him. But at the same time he doesn't want to be presumptuous.

Recognising that he is undeserving and wretched. To be even spoken to. But of course our Lord is full of grace. And he does grant him his request. But the same goes for you and I and our disease of sin.

Firstly, the first question we need to ask is. Have we actually seen our sinful condition? Have we recognised the symptoms showing up in our own life? If you read your Bible for long enough you'll soon get a diagnosis.

Jesus later on in Mark 7 from verse 20 reads. What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts.

[20:21] Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within. And they defile a person. So are you aware tonight that this is describing you? If you are then you need to come straight to Christ.

Pray to him with a firm trust like the leper. Knowing that you need to be healed. And that is the only thing that matters to you. But to come humbly. As J.C. Ryle would say.

Bowing the knees of your souls. Knowing that you are unworthy. And you could never cleanse yourself. Salvation is all of him. And is on his terms.

So must ask the question. Have you repented? Have you trusted? And knowing that salvation is accomplished by his will. So let's move on now to the second point.

[21 : 22] Verses 41 and 42. Jesus' response. The willing saviour. We see here first. Jesus' emotions are described in the text.

It says here that he is moved with pity. It talks. The thought is more. He is moved within his inner being. We might even say today from his guts.

He is moved. He feels for this man. He cares for this man. No doubt being reminded of the effects of the fall. Every time he sees a person who is sick like this.

It is destructive nature. The destructive nature of sin. As he has this poor man before him. So he stretched out his hand. And he touched him. His perfectly clean hand placed upon the unclean leper.

In doing so. According to the outward decree of the law. Jesus made himself unclean. And how much is this a clear picture of the gospel.

[22 : 23] How on the cross Jesus was made sin for us. The righteous for the unrighteous. The clean for the unclean. He takes away all of our uncleanness of our sin.

And making us new in God's sight. Notice as well. This was instant. We read there that word that occurs so many times in the gospel of Mark. The word immediately.

And immediately the leprosy left this man. There was no process. There was no stages of the sin going soft and hard. No trace of leprosy at all.

Just like Naaman. A total and a full healing. And again a wonderful and a marvelous picture of salvation that the Lord provides. Not only is it a full salvation.

But it's an instantaneous salvation. To be made righteous or justified in God's sight is not a process. The Roman Catholic Church. Jehovah's Witnesses.

[23 : 19] The Mormons. They would all teach. That yes you must have faith in Christ. But then you must do that. And then you must do that. And then if you sin you must go and see that man. And then if you do a certain sin.

Then you must do something else. And you are never truly righteous. But no that is not true Christianity. True Christianity says. That it is Christ and Christ alone. Faith alone.

The moment you believe you are made righteous in an instant. Justification is instantaneous. And so let's move on now to the two commands.

The third point. That is from verses 43 to 44.

The first command is. That this man isn't to say anything to anyone. Jesus wants him to keep this healing a secret. He gives no reason at this point.

[24 : 20] And we are not told directly why. But we will soon find out why. Because in verse 45. Jesus can't even enter a city anymore. That is famous spread that much. So he has to withdraw.

You see Jesus didn't want to be known. Just as a healer. We must remember that his primary ministry. Was a ministry of preaching.

Before he went to the cross. Just go back. We will see there in verse 38. If you just go back above. Where we started reading. In verse 38 he says to them. To his disciples.

Let us go on to the next towns. That I may preach there. Also. For that is why I came out. So the preaching of the gospel.

To every sin sick person. The way of salvation. Was always Jesus priority. And when Jesus did heal somebody. Yes it was an act of compassion. But it also served.

[25 : 16] Another very important purpose. And that was to prove who he was. That he was indeed the son of God. And that the message he brought. Was to be listened to.

Because it was the message of God. But when he preached. Many people found it hard to listen to. And many didn't stay. He spoke about sin. He spoke about hell.

Repentance. Self-denial. Taking up your cross. And many were offended. And so many didn't stay long. But when he healed people. Well. Who doesn't want healing?

Everyone shows up. And he was often mobbed by people. Constantly. Wanting healing. But his bigger job. Was always to do the preaching of the gospel.

Another reason. Why he may not have wanted the word to go out. Was something that John actually mentioned this morning. That his time had not yet come. Jesus. All throughout his ministry.

[26 : 13] Up until the end. Had to be very measured. About the level of his fame. He didn't want to start a political uprising. Until the end of his ministry. He didn't want to disturb the public peace.

Too much. Until the correct time. When it was time for him to be crucified. Three years later. When it was the right time. And so those are some reasons we can give.

Why Jesus didn't want the man to say anything. And then we see the second command. He says. Show yourself to the priest. And make the offering required for your cleansing. Now Jesus instructs him.

To obey the mosaic law. We can read about that in Leviticus chapter 14. And it's quite a process. And it's quite fascinating. All at the same time.

When a priest inspected a leper. Who was perhaps by God's grace. In recovery of leprosy. In order to be made clean. And to be accepted back into society.

[27 : 10] And into the temple. There was a ceremony. And it involved two clean birds. Now one of these birds was killed over running. Was killed over running fresh water.

And the other bird is kept alive. And had the blood of the first bird. Sprinkled upon the second bird. And that bird was then used to sprinkle the man clean.

To show he was clean of his leprosy. And then eight days later. There was another sacrifice. This time it was of lambs. And it involved oil as well. After he had washed and shaved and bathed himself.

There was a mixture of oil and of blood. And it was put on various parts of his body. On his thumb. On his big toe. And on his ear lobe.

Showing the whole cleansing. That had taken place. This was officially to pronounce him clean. So in this. Jesus was actually upholding the ceremonial law.

[28 : 09] That he would soon. By the new covenant abolish. This was a. Quite a unique time. This interim time. Between the old and the new covenant. When Jesus still said no.

The old testament laws had to be. Obeyed until the beginning of the new. When Jesus. Would be the once for all. All sacrifice. That all those other. Sacrifices of the birds.

And the lambs. Would a picture to. But then here we see. In the last. Words of verse 44. The real reason. Jesus wants him to do this. Well. Not real reason.

But a big reason. It's for. A proof to them. Is for a proof. To the priests. Jesus may not have wanted. The general public. To know about this healing.

But he certainly. He certainly wanted the priests. To know. What had happened to this man. This was for their benefit. And we know that. As the gospel. As the gospel goes on. That. The religious leaders.

[29 : 05] Become increasingly hostile. Towards Jesus. Jesus. They denounce his miracles. Discount what he says. And he wants these men. To see his work.

But not only to see his work. But to verify his work. That he did indeed. Make this man clean. This is rock solid evidence. Of Jesus divine power. And claims to be God.

God. The highest ranking men. In Israel. Had no excuse. For their unbelief. They even had to verify. One of his miracles. And the same is today.

Jesus never leaves. Any man. Without excuse. To believe in him. So finally. Let's look at the command. Disobeyed. This passage ends. On rather a sad note really.

As the man disobeys. He does exactly the opposite. Of what Jesus says. He talks freely. He spreads the news. The AV puts it. That he blazed abroad.

[30 : 00] The matter. So it's almost like wildfire. Going around that area of Israel. He probably. No doubt. Was just. Over excited. About his life saving healing.

And he just had to tell everyone he met. But that was no excuse. For disobeying the direct command of Christ. Because now was not the time. Well how does that apply to us today?

Well I think. We actually today. I know even myself. We have the opposite problem. This man spoke out. When he was told to remain silent.

We have. We're in far bigger danger. Of remaining silent. When we should speak out. Like we are commanded to. We don't speak out for. Potential embarrassment.

Or perhaps even an awkward conversation. Jesus says to us now. And he said to his disciples.

Then go. Therefore. And make disciples of all nations. The Lord may well have put someone in your path.

[31 : 00] That he wants to talk to you. To them about the gospel. And he wants to use you. As an instrument. And. And. And. So as we leave this passage. We see. Jesus and the man.

In a way of changed places. Jesus now has to stay on the outside of the city. In desolate places. But where's the man? Well the man is now allowed.

Allowed inside the city. He's healed. And restored. And what an amazing picture of the gospel that is. A final picture. Because at the end of this book of Mark. We see Jesus crucified outside the city. Bearing our sin. All our uncleanness. All alone. Upon the cross. He was cut off from the land of the living. He was despised and rejected by men.

Smitten by God. And afflicted. And he was crushed for our iniquities. And the cleansed leper. Just like the cleansed sinner. Is free. And clean.

[31 : 57] Purified and restored. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. That we might die to sin. And live to righteousness. By his wounds.

You have been healed. Amen.