

I will; be clean

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Preacher: John M. Davidson

[0 : 00] If you would turn back with me please to that portion of scripture that we read in Mark's gospel. Mark's gospel in chapter 1. And we'll look at verses 40 and 41 again.

Mark chapter 1 and we'll have a look at verses 40 and 41. And a leper came to him, imploring him and kneeling, said to him, If you will you can make me clean.

Moved with pity he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean.

Jack is ten years old. He is smaller and he is less athletic than the rest of the boys in his class.

And young Jack is out on the football pitch with his friends. And two of the more honoured boys, that is two of the more cooler boys, they are captains of their teams.

[1 : 15] And the two captains select their team from that group of eager participants. Back and forth.

And of course the best players are chosen first. Back and forth. Back and forth. And as the selection pool gets smaller and smaller and with each pick, the remaining boys, including our friend Jack, they become increasingly self-conscious.

And then embarrassed. You see, shame is reserved for the last boy standing. Jack is not picked at all at first, but the team with a few boys in it take him anyway.

Slowly head down, he heads over to his team. The teams are complete. The opposing team laughs at Jack.

While his own team groan. It's as if they have become contaminated. Apparently shame was contagious on the football pitch.

[2 : 38] Jack does not hear the captain say, Hey lads, we are all in this together. You see, the young boy will become the scapegoat for his team's loss.

For young Jack, that experience might very well pass. Who knows, the rejected boy very well one day might become the powerful chief executive of a multinational company.

Who knows, where he gets to do the picking and the firing. And if that is the case, perhaps the curse of that old shameful experience on the football pitch, it could be reversed.

But in life, it is not always that easy. More often than not, scratch away at the surface of the adult.

That is Jack, who is the chief executive of this company. And there is the rejected 10-year-old boy. He is still there.

[3 : 49] And he is still hearing the derision and the laughter of his teammates. It is a powerful story.

Now our leper, our leper in the passage that we have just read, he understood exactly the way Jack felt.

Because he lived it every day. Our friend, the leper, who we have met in this text, he lived the life of isolation and the life of shame.

Verse 40 tells us, And a leper came to him. And a leper came to him. And to understand our leper's predicament and this life of isolation and this life of shame, we must enter into his world.

His world of loneliness. His world of loneliness outside of the camp. We must enter into his world of rules and regulations.

[5 : 00] His world of the clean and the unclean. His world of the common and the holy. His world of honor and shame.

But before we look at these things, let's first look at his physical condition. Our man suffered from what is known today as Hansen's disease.

It is named after the man who diagnosed its cause. And it is not, as was thought for millennia, it is not a rotting infection.

What happens with leprosy is, is the disease works as an anesthetic against pain. If you had leprosy in your hand, and if you were to put your hand on the fire, you would feel no pain.

Hence the physical deformities that come with the disease. According to Luke, in his account, the man Luke tells us, he is full of leprosy.

[6 : 15] From the top of his head down to his feet, he is full of leprosy. Josephus, the first century Roman historian, describes those afflicted with the disease, and this is what he says, they are in no way differing from a corpse.

The rabbis of Jesus' day called them the living dead. And as if all this was not bad enough for our friend the leper in our text here this day, the man had to follow the Mosaic law.

And he had to live outside of the camp. If you were to turn this day to Leviticus chapter 13 and Leviticus chapter 14, you would see all the regulations concerning leprosy and other skin diseases laid out there for us by the Lord.

You see, lepers lived in huts outside of the camp. Their huts were no bigger than dog kennels. They lived in little colonies outside of the towns.

Now rabbinical law stipulated that if you were to pass a leper, you were not allowed to greet a leper. You could not say good morning or good afternoon to a leper.

[7 : 47] The rabbis had banned that. If you were upwind of a leper, you had to keep a distance of 45 meters. If you were downwind of a leper, you had to keep a distance of 1.8 meters.

This is the rabbis laws. This is not the Lord's laws. This is the rabbis laws who added to God's laws. And I have no idea what you did when there was no wind. If you contracted, if you had the disease, you left all behind.

You left family behind. You left your work behind. You left the church behind. You left everything that you ever knew, you left it behind.

And you lived a life of shame. And you would live a life of isolation outside of the camp. Unclean, unclean, unclean is the motto of the leper.

Unclean, unclean, I am unclean. Anytime anyone would ever come anywhere near you, that is what you would have to shout.

[9 : 01] I am unclean. I am unclean. Now I do not know if our friend the leper here had a family or not.

The text does not say. But let's say that he did. And he's walking down the road and he sees his wife and he sees his children in the distance and he would have to shout out to them, please do not come near me for I am unclean.

I am unclean. The life of shame and the life of isolation. You see, leprosy was not so much a disease as a sentence.

So there we have his physical condition. How about his spiritual condition? To understand our leper's spiritual condition, we also have to venture into the Old Testament.

And in Leviticus 10.10, the Lord God says to Moses' servant, you are to distinguish between the holy and the common.

[10 : 11] And between the unclean and the clean. You see, with these four categories, that is, holy and common, clean and unclean, with these four categories, God gave them in the Old Testament, the basic building blocks of the spiritual universe in which he built.

You will find yourself, you will find everything else in two of the four groups. Now there are no prizes for guessing which category a leper fell into.

He was in the category of the unclean. You see, by Old Testament terms, you cannot be a little clean.

You cannot be a sort of unclean. You are one or the other. You see, cleanness acceptable.

Uncleanness defiled and cast out, hence, outside of the camp. There are many things in the Old Testament scriptures that you read about that would make a person unclean, like touching a dead body would make you unclean.

[11 : 31] Idolatry made the whole nation unclean. Skin diseases as leprosy here also made people unclean. And many other things would make a person or a group of people unclean.

This is the life of our leper. You see, clean, by Old Testament terms, is normal. Unclean is abnormal.

You see, the clean cannot cleanse the unclean. But the unclean can contaminate the clean. That is one reason why the unclean, such as a leper, had to be separated away from those that were deemed as clean.

You see, if you are unclean, there is something wrong with you. You are not like other people. You are just not normal. You stick out and you are kicked out if you are unclean.

If you read the Old Testament scriptures, you look for the word defiled. And there you will meet the unclean. They were cut off and they were untouchable.

[12:45] They needed to be cleansed. The clean and the unclean. Now you did not want to find yourself in the category the same as our leper of the unclean.

But scripture also talks about the pure. Scripture also talks about the pure in heart.

Scripture also talks to us about the uncontaminated or the upright. The upright. In order to go to the worship service in the temple or in any synagogue, you had to be clean.

Now before we move on, there is another category in the world of our friend the leper here this day. There was the category of the holy. And there was the category of the common.

Now the category of the holy is all about God. He is set apart. He is holy and only he is holy.

[14:05] The category of the common that incorporated both the clean and the unclean. They were together as common. But as we turn our attention to that which is holy, which is the Lord God, our attention is directed to him.

He is the Holy One of Israel. The Old Testament tells us. He is holy and listen to this part.

Anything that he declares as holy is automatically made holy. He is holy and anything that the Lord God declares as holy is automatically made holy.

Anything that is made holy by the Lord God is unique. Anything that is made holy by the Lord God is honored. These things were highly honored because the Lord God of Israel said they were holy.

The Garden of Eden was holy because the Lord God dwelt there. Sinai was holy because the Lord came down and would meet with Moses on Sinai.

[15:28] So that was made holy. Jerusalem, of course, was holy. The temple was holy. Certain days were made holy.

The Sabbath is still holy. Certain feasts were holy. These things that are made holy by the Lord, they are consecrated.

If you see the word consecrated in the Old Testament, that means that they are highly honored by God and they are made holy by the Lord God.

They are dedicated to the service of the Lord. They are dedicated to the service of the Lord. People too could become holy or sacred even if they belonged to the realm of the common.

They were uniquely honored. The priests were made holy. Holy means that a person or an object is uniquely devoted to God. The person or the thing that belongs to God and thereby shares in his holiness.

[16:37] If the Lord God set apart anything and made it holy, it would share in his holiness. They would be uniquely honored.

Yet there is one peculiarity in all this. The Lord God says in Leviticus 11.45 I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God.

You shall therefore be holy for I am holy. The Lord God had a people set apart. Now you might be here this day and thinking to yourself why on earth are you telling me all of this?

why on earth do I need to know and understand all these old categories in the Old Testament?

After all is this not the 21st century? Do we really need to know all of these categories? Well the answer to that is yes we do.

[17:57] because you and I and our friend the leper fit into one of these categories even today.

You see sin has left each and every one of us in the category of the unclean. Such is the power of sin. listen to Isaiah 64 and at verse 6 the Lord God saying to the prophet he says the prophet is saying we he says all of us we have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment he says you see his spiritual condition that is the leper spiritual condition is your spiritual condition and my spiritual condition outside of Christ more on that later I want to move on and with sin comes shame shame is one of the most powerful of all human emotions and this leper knew all about shame our friend the leper lived a life of shame that only the Lord Jesus Christ could do anything about you know this man was not any lesser or greater a sinner than you or I yet he lived this life of shame and this life of isolation until that day when he would meet the Lord Jesus Christ you know he was in the category of the unclean and he knew it he knew it shame and this I came across a book a number of years ago entitled shame interrupted how God lifts the pain of worthlessness and rejection it's a wonderful title shame interrupted how God lifts the

pain of worthlessness and rejection and listen to the author describe shame he says it's the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did or something done to you or something associated with you you feel exposed and you feel humiliated this is the life of our leper whom we meet in the scriptures this day until he meets the

Lord Jesus Christ you go to a dinner party we will not be discussing shame but this is no dinner party this is the pulpit of God and these subjects must be addressed because with sin comes shame Homer the Greek poet said shame greatly hurts or greatly helps mankind you see for our leper shame was crude it was intrusive it was demanding and it was relentless day in and day out you know don't expect subtlety or refined manners when shame is confronted and also don't forget shame's public nature you know guilt can be hidden away in our hearts but shame feels like it is always exposed our man the leper lived the quiet killer that is shame listen to

Welsh continue to describe this emotion he says it is life dominating and it is stubborn once entrenched in your heart and mind it is like a squatter that refuses to leave you see to be human is to feel shame to one degree or another with sin comes shame what we have here in our text this day is a picture of you and a picture of me out with Christ it is a picture of our spiritual condition without Christ it is a picture of complete corruption that would shame us you see without the Lord Jesus Christ we are spiritual lepers who have no hope of cleansing there is no hope of cleansing out with Christ there is no hope of cleansing apart from Christ we apart from Christ are unclean let's pause for a wee moment and we see that

[23 : 14] Mark the author of this gospel he is very clever in what he is doing here he is very very clever in the way he has written this for us he is very clever listen to Kent Hughes in his commentary explain listen to what he says he says all Christ's miracles were parables which visibly portrayed the effects of the spirit's work among mankind for instance he says his healing the blind what did it do well it portrayed his illumination of darkened hearts the calming the storm told of his power to bring peace to troubled hearts raising the dead proclaimed his life giving power his feeding of the 5000 spoke of his being the bread of life R.C.

Trench the Greek scholar and the inspiration and the editor of the very first English Oxford Dictionary recognized this and listen to what he says listen to what he says though the leper was not worse or guiltier than his fellow countrymen he was nevertheless a parable for sin he was nevertheless a parable for sin and outward visible sign of innermost spiritual corruption listen to Hughes describe his life this nature of leprosy with its insidious slow subtle beginnings it's like sin isn't it slow subtle beginnings it's slow progress it's destructive power and the ultimate ruin it brings makes it a powerful symbol of moral depravity it is a picture of me and it's a picture of you out with Christ have I said enough it's a parable of sin her leper was isolated and he was ashamed and then he meets the Lord of glory he meets the Lord of glory this was the life of her leper until he has this divine appointment this appointment was set in eternity past where this leper would meet the Lord Jesus our text tells us he came up to him unashamed he says he was imploring him and kneeling said to him if you will you can make me clean if you will you can make me clean you see the leper knew his condition both physical and spiritual he could easily have approached

Jesus in a different manner and could have said Jesus look at me look at the life that I must live why am I like this and everyone else seems to be unaffected no he doesn't come to Jesus in that way he could have come to the Lord Jesus and spoke about his rotten luck or perhaps he could have come to the Lord Jesus and spoke about his rights but he doesn't do that either he knew his condition he did not fall into the trap that Peter fell into in John chapter 21 where he points to John and he says why does this man not have to die no he doesn't do that either the story is told of a Prussian king named Frederick Frederick the Great was his name and there was one day he was touring a Berlin prison and as he toured the prison all the prisoners fell down on their knees before him proclaiming their innocence oh king

I am innocent oh king I am innocent apart from one man and the king was slightly bemused by this one man and he says why are you here oh armed robbery your highness and are you guilty oh yes indeed I am guilty I deserve my punishment your highness and on hearing that Frederick summoned the jailer and he said release this guilty wretch at once I will not have him kept in this prison where he will corrupt all these fine innocent prisoners etc has the Menschen happen nothing but love and compassion.

[28 : 23] Verse 41 Moved with pity he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him I will be clean.

Now we see the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God take full control of the situation. He now shows us that he is the master and he is the commander of all of these Old Testament categories that we were studying earlier on.

He is the one who is in charge of all of these categories and he is moved with pity. He is moved with pity.

And you know it is probably the first time in many a long year that anyone has ever listened to this man. This man who had to live that life of shame and isolation outside of the camp.

It is probably the first time that anyone has ever listened to him. Never mind show compassion. The text tells us the Lord is filled to the uttermost with compassion.

[29 : 37] You see the compassion that Jesus felt he felt it in his stomach. He felt it in his gut. Listen to David McKenna he describes it this way it was not just mind for mind he says hand for hand or even heart for heart but it was stomach for stomach blood for blood gut for gut.

Jesus feels his way into the leper's needs. You see in the ancient world one felt compassion in the stomach. Today we talk about the heart not so in the ancient world.

You would describe feeling compassion for somebody as feeling it in your stomach. Listen to the great preacher Alexander McLaren. He says he pitied not only in order to teach us the heart of God. He pitied not only in order to teach us the heart of God but because his own man's heart was touched with a feeling of men's infirmities.

In other words not only does Jesus pity us he understands us. Not only does he pity us but he understands us.

[30 : 55] He stretched out his hand and he touched him. You can imagine all the bystanders. You weren't allowed to greet a leper. Never mind touch a leper.

And listen to one commentator Westcott the great Greek scholar. He says there was more than just superficial contact here. It wasn't just a wee pat on the arm.

You see the phrase touched. That wee phrase touched. It is often translated as he took hold off. He took hold off.

You see the Lord Jesus wants this leper and he wants you and he wants me not only to hear his willingness to save and to have pity on us but he wants us to feel it.

He wants us to feel it. He in essence is saying to the leper I understand you and I love you. I will help you.

[32 : 01] And what does Jesus do? What does Jesus do? He stretches out his hand across that massive wall of separation. That great gulf of separation and he stretches out his hand and he embraces the leper.

I understand you. I love you. I will heal you he says. And as we read our text and as we study this together here this day we marvel at the very humanness of Jesus.

The very humanness of Jesus. We see his emotions here. The emotional life of Jesus.

We see it laid bare before us. He pitied him. He had compassion on him. Because he was made like us. Listen to the book of Hebrews.

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and great high priest in the service of God to make propitiations for the sins of the people.

[33 : 14] He had to become like us apart from sin of course. You see what we have in this story also is an image of the incarnation.

That is God. That God we were talking about when we were looking at these categories. That God that is holy. That God that is set apart.

That God that is beyond anything we can possibly comprehend. Yes that God that we worship here this day. Here he is in the flesh. With love and pity in his heart.

It's a picture of the incarnation of God becoming flesh in the person of his son. The one who would leave glory to come and to seek that which was lost.

You see if there was no incarnation there would have been no touch. No incarnation no cleansing.

[34 : 14] No incarnation no healing. No incarnation no salvation. No incarnation no glory no hope for sinners but praise God that this God became human.

So do we see what Jesus is saying to the leper and to you and I this day? He is saying I will swap places with you.

I will become the one who is rejected and lonely. I will be the one who will carry your sin and your shame outside of the camp.

and I will be the one who will be crucified naked upon a cross. I will swap places with you. As Galatians teaches us this Christ this glorious son of God he redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us for it is written cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. the son of God will swap places with you and I and he would swap places with the leper.

[35 : 33] The leper would come from that life of isolation and shame and he would come back into the community of God God's people again and Christ would be the one who would be taken outside of the camp and crucified so the leper could come back in so that you and I could come back in but we must let Christ deal with it all in our lives.

Do you see what's happened here to this leper? You know our leper in one sense has gone from unclean and he has bypassed every other category and he has gone straight to holy.

That's what happens to the life of a sinner. We are unclean and when the Lord Jesus comes into our life and into our hearts in one sense we are set apart.

Yes of course we have active sanctification where we have been made holy every day of our lives but in one sense we are holy because the Lord has made us holy.

Listen to 1 Peter tell his congregation he says but you are a chosen race you are a royal priesthood you are a people for his own possession.

[36 : 56] He has gone from unclean to holy in one jump he has been justified by grace he has been justified he has been made right in the eyes of God you see it is only Jesus that can cleanse us it is only the Lord Jesus that can change us it is only the Lord Jesus that can do anything about our sin and our shame but we must allow him to do so moved with pity filled with compassion if I was to ask you a question here this day a simple question how are you righteous before

God how are you righteous before God God well outside of scripture I have found nowhere in everything I have ever read as question and answer 60 in the Heidelberg Catechism which was written by two 20 something year olds in Heidelberg University they founded Heidelberg University and they answer it as this way how are you righteous before God only by true faith in Jesus Christ although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all of God's commandments and I have never kept any of them they say and you know something else I am still inclined toward all evil nevertheless God without any merit of my own out of mere grace imputes to me the perfect satisfaction righteousness and holiness of

Christ and he grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin did you catch that put as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me if only I accept this gift with a believing heart isn't that beautiful isn't that beautiful nevertheless God nevertheless God without any merit of my own imputes to me the perfect satisfaction righteousness and holiness of Christ he grants these to me as I have never sinned nor committed any sin the question is have you accepted this gift have you accepted this gift that you hear in the gospel every time you hear it are you doubting the one who is offering this gift since you are willing you can make me clean let us pray
Lord