

Mark 1:41

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[0 : 00] Mark's Gospel and chapter 1. Mark's Gospel and chapter 1. And we'll have a look again at the verses Mark 40 and 41. So Mark chapter 1 and at verse 40.

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 10 years old. He is smaller and he is less athletic than the rest of the boys his age.

And he's out in the playground playing football. And two of the more honoured boys, that is, two of the more cool boys, they are the captains.

[1 : 03] And they are selecting their teams from an eager group of young boys waiting to be picked. So back and forth, back and forth, the boys are selected for each team.

And of course the best players get chosen first. And as the selection pool gets smaller and smaller, with each pick, the remaining boys, including Jack, they become slightly more and increasingly more self-conscious.

Then a wee bit embarrassed. You see, shame is reserved for the last boy standing. He doesn't get picked at all.

So the team with less players takes him, just as a footnote and just as an afterthought. The opposing team laughs at young Jack while his team groans.

The teams are complete. Apparently shame is contagious. The young boy seems to spread it to his teammates.

[2 : 18] Jack does not hear the captain say, Hey lads, we are all in this together. No. Young Jack will become the scapegoat for his team's loss.

Now for young Jack, that experience might very well pass as the years roll on.

Who knows, the rejected boy very well may become the powerful chief executive of a large multinational company. Who knows?

And if so, he can do the hiring and the firing, the picking and the choosing. And if that happens, or if anything as close as that happens, well, the curse of that old shameful day might be reversed.

But often it is not that easy. More often than not, scratch beneath the surface of this chief executive named Jack, just a wee scratch and beneath the surface is the rejected 10-year-old boy.

[3 : 41] Still hearing the derision of his teammates and the laughter of his teammates. Our friend the leper who we have met in this passage, he understood what Jack felt in our little illustration.

Because our friend the leper in the scripture that we have just read, he lived the life of shame and derision every day of his existence.

Our life, our friend the leper here in the passage that we have just read, he lived the life of shame and the life of isolation.

Until one day, he would meet the son of the living God. And nothing would be the same again.

So I want to look at three topics in our passage here this morning. And the first one is going to be shame. The second we're going to look at is providence.

[4 : 53] They don't, there's no alliteration, I'm sorry. And thirdly, and praise God, we're going to look at the subject of reconciliation. So we have shame, then we have providence, and then we have reconciliation.

First, we have shame. Verse 40 tells us, And a leper came to him. You see, to understand our leper's predicament, We must enter into his world.

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

His world of the clean and of the unclean. His world of the common and the holy. His world of honor and shame.

But first, But first, let's look at his physical condition. To understand the predicament of our friend the leper in our passage here this day, We must understand his physical condition.

[6 : 16] Our man suffered from what is known today as Hansen's disease. It was named after the man who diagnosed its cause.

Now they tell me that it is not a rotting infection as was thought for hundreds if not thousands of years. What happens with leprosy is the body's natural warning system for pain.

It is destroyed. It is obliterated. So if you were to contract, if you were to get leprosy, And you had it on your hand, And if you were to put your hand in the fire, You would feel no pain.

Hence the deformities that came along with this disease. The disease works kind of like an anesthetic against pain.

Luke, in his account of the same story, Says that the man is full of leprosy. Leprosy. From the top of his head to the soles of his feet, It is all-consuming.

[7 : 27] He is full of leprosy, Luke tells us. Josephus, the first century historian, Describes those afflicted with the disease As in no way differing from a corpse.

No way differing from a corpse. And the rabbis in Jesus' day Called them the living dead. The life of our friend, the leper.

Now, as if all that were not bad enough for this leper, He had to follow the Mosaic law.

He had to follow all the rules and regulations concerning leprosy. He had to live outside of the camp. He wasn't allowed to live with ordinary, clean people.

He had to live outside of the camp. And if you were to turn to Leviticus chapter 13 and Leviticus chapter 14, You would see all the regulations laid down in the scriptures Concerning leprosy and other and various other skin diseases.

[8 : 40] So they lived outside of the camp. They lived in little huts no bigger than dog kennels. In camps and in colonies outside of the town.

Now, the rabbis and the rabbinical law stipulated that if you saw a leper walking down the road, You were not allowed to greet him.

And if you were upwind of a leper, You had to keep a distance of 45 meters away. It wasn't in the scriptures, but they added to the scriptures.

If you were downwind of a leper, you had to stay 1.8 meters away. I'm not sure what you did if there was no wind. If you contracted this disease, leprosy, in the first century, You would have to leave everything behind.

Your family, your work, coming to the synagogue or coming to the temple to worship, You would have to leave it all behind.

[9 : 52] You see, if you or I were to contract this disease in the first century, Our motto would be, I am unclean, I am unclean.

Do not come near me, I am unclean. So we can picture our leper, Who we have met in the scriptures this morning.

And perhaps, I do not know, the scripture does not tell us, Perhaps he had a wife and family. And he's walking down the road, And there he sees his wife and his family.

And he says to them, and he shouts to them, Do not come near me, I am unclean. I am unclean. You see, leprosy was not so much of a disease, As it was a sentence.

So much for his physical condition. How about his spiritual condition? To understand our leper's spiritual condition, We too must venture into the Old Testament.

[11 : 10] And in Leviticus 10.10, The Lord God says to his servant and his prophet Moses, You are to distinguish between the holy and the common.

And you are to distinguish between the unclean and the clean. And with these four categories, The Lord God showed us and built for us The basic building blocks of the spiritual universe In which we live.

Clean, unclean, common, holy. And if you were to live at the same time as our friend the leper Here in the first century, And in Old Testament times, You would find yourself and everything that the Lord God Has created in one or two of these categories That the Lord gave us.

Now, there are no prizes here this day For guessing which category our leper fell into. He fell into the category of the unclean.

And by Old Testament terms, You could not be a little clean And a sort of unclean. You were one or the other.

[12 : 38] Clean, you see, was acceptable. Unclean is defiled. And it is cast out.

And when you read the scriptures in the Old Testament, You will see, Touching a dead body made a person unclean. Idolatry was a major one that made the whole of Israel unclean.

Skin diseases made people unclean. And many other things made a person unclean. But there was always a way back. For those who had, for instance, Touched a dead body, There was a sacrifice.

And you were allowed back into the camp after a while. But for the leper, There was no way back. You see, clean was normal.

Unclean was abnormal. You see, the clean could not cleanse the unclean. But the unclean could contaminate the clean.

[13 : 45] That is one reason the unclean, Such as our leper, They are separated. They are cast away. They are not like other people.

You are not normal. You stick out. And you are kicked out. If you have leprosy. If you look for the word defiled in the Old Testament, There you will see our friend, the leper.

Cut off an untouchable. Where the unclean such as our leper. Clean and unclean. You did not want to be in the category of the unclean.

Now before we move on, There was another category. In the world and in the life of our leper. There was the holy. And there was the common.

Now the category of the holy is all about the Lord God. The category of the common incorporates the clean and the unclean in it.

[15 : 00] That is all created things are common. But when you turn toward the holy, Your attention is directed toward the Lord God, The Holy One, The One that we worship here this day.

He is holy, And He alone is holy. And anything that He declares holy is made holy. For instance, The garden of Eden was declared holy because the Lord God walked in the cool of the day.

That was made holy. Certain places could also be holy. Mount Sinai was made holy because the Lord God would come down and meet His servant Moses.

So it was declared as holy. The temple, of course, was holy. Because the Lord God dwelled there and met His people there. Certain days were holy.

The Sabbath today is still holy. Certain feasts were holy. You see, these things that the Lord declared as holy, They were set apart.

[16 : 14] They were consecrated. They were made holy to the Lord. They were dedicated to the Lord, the scriptures teach us. You know, people too could become holy or sacred Because they were made holy and sacred by the Lord.

But you see, to be holy you had to be clean. But being clean did not make you holy. Only a few, such as the priests, were made clean and declared holy by the Lord.

They were uniquely honoured. Holy means that a person or an object is uniquely devoted to God.

It is set apart. The person or thing that belongs to God and thereby shares in His holiness, it is set apart.

While the unclean are set apart for other reasons, Anything that the Lord God declares as holy is set apart because it is uniquely honoured by Him.

[17 : 24] Yet, there is one peculiarity in all of this. Because the Lord God said to His people in Leviticus 11.45, He says, I am the Lord your God.

I brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. And what does He say to them? You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

And He's talking to the whole of His people. Now you might be here today and you might be thinking to yourself, preacher, why on earth are you telling me all this?

About all of these Old Testament categories. Why do I need to know all of this as we look at the scripture here this day? Well, it's simply because of this.

Because you and I and our friend the leper fit into one of these categories.

[18 : 32] Let's leave aside the category of the common. What do we have? Unclean, clean and holy. You see, sin has put us and placed us into the category of the unclean.

You see, His spiritual condition is our spiritual condition outside of Christ.

Let me say that again. His spiritual condition is our spiritual condition if we are outside of Christ. More on that later.

And with sin comes shame. And shame is one of the most powerful of all human emotions. And this, our friend the leper knew all about sin and shame.

He knew that he was in the category of the unclean. And with that came his life of shame. This was a man who had ambitions the same as you and I have ambitions.

- [20 : 02] This was a man who had hopes the same way as you and I have hopes. This is a man whose life didn't quite turn out the way he expected it to turn out.
- This is not what he had planned. Things had gone terribly wrong for our friend the leper. Yet this man was not any lesser or greater a sinner than me or you.
- Yet he lived a life of shame because of his leprosy. He was in the category of the unclean. And you know something? He knew it.
- He knew it. I came across a book a couple of years ago by a man called Ed Welch. And he wrote a book on shame.
- And this is the title. It's a wonderful title. The title is Shame Interrupted. How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection.
- [21 : 05] Shame Interrupted. How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection. Now listen to Welch describe this human emotion of shame.
- He says it's the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you have done. Or something done to you. Or something associated with you.
- You feel exposed and humiliated. This is the life of our leper until he met Jesus.
- Homer the Greek poet said that shame greatly hurts or helps mankind. You see for our friend the leper in our text here this day.
- Shame was crude. Shame was intrusive. Shame was demanding. Shame was relentless.
- [22 : 05] Shame was relentless. Day in and day out. You know don't expect subtlety or refined manners. When we confront the topic of shame.
- Because with sin comes shame. And of course don't forget shame's public nature. You see and we know it well. Guilt can be hidden.
- Shame feels like it is always exposed. Shame. Shame. Shame. Shame. Shame. Shame.
- Welch goes on and describes some basics about this emotion. He says it is life dominating and it is stubborn. Life.
- It is life dominating and it is stubborn. And once it is entrenched in your heart and mind. It is like a squatter that refuses to leave. But to be human is to feel shame to one degree or another.
- [23 : 07] And with sin comes shame. You see Mark is very clever in what he is doing here.
- And how he incorporates this wonderful miracle into this narrative. You see what we have here in our text. Is a picture of you and I.
- Because of sin. Because of sin. Sin too is life dominating isn't it? Isn't it stubborn?
- And once it is entrenched in our heart and mind. It is like a squatter that refuses to leave. You see you and I can do nothing.
- About our sin. We live in a world where people think they can clean themselves up. And get their act together.
- [24 : 10] We cannot get our act together. Because of sin. There is only one who can do anything about sin and shame in our lives.
- You see what Mark is doing here. He is very clever. And listen to Kent Hughes in his commentary. He explains it. Listen to what he says. He says, All Christ's miracles were parables.
- He says. Which visibly portrayed the effects of the spirit work among mankind. For instance he says. His healing the blind.
- What did it do? It portrayed the illumination of darkened hearts. The coming of the storm. Told of his power to bring peace to troubled hearts.

Raising the dead. Proclaimed his life giving power. The feeding of the 5,000. Spoke of his being the bread of life. That is Jesus.

[25 : 17] R.C. Trench. The Greek scholar. And the man who was the inspiration. And the first editor of the very first English Oxford Dictionary. Recognised this.

And this is what he says. He says. Though the leper was not worse or guiltier than his fellow countrymen. He was nevertheless a parable of sin.

An outward visible sign of innermost spiritual corruption. He's hit the nail on the head. Hasn't he? Hasn't he? Hughes describes sin and shame.

And the leprosy that this man suffered of. Listen to what he says. He says. The nature of leprosy. With its insidious. Its slow, subtle beginnings. It sounds like sin, doesn't it?

Its slow, subtle beginnings. Its slow progress. Its destructive power. And the ultimate ruin it brings. It makes it a powerful symbol.

[26 : 18] For moral depravity. That is what Mark is doing. He is showing that this leprosy. Is a powerful symbol of moral depravity and sin.

It is a picture of you and me outwith of Christ. Our leper was isolated. He was ashamed. And then he meets the Lord of glory.

And then everything would change. Everything would change. You see our friend the leper had a divine appointment.

And in this divine appointment he becomes absolutely shameless. And he approached Jesus. In verse 40. Its text tells us.

Imploring him. And kneeling said to him. If you will. Jesus. If you will. You. And you alone. Can make me clean.

[27 : 25] So here we have providence. For our friend the leper. You see our friend the leper knew his condition.

You know our friend the leper could very well easily have approached the Lord Jesus. In a very different manner. And said Lord Jesus look at me. Look at the life that I must live.

Why am I like this? And everyone else is untouched. He didn't say that. He could have talked about his rotten luck. Or he could have started fighting for his rights perhaps.

But he did not do that. If you will Lord Jesus. You can make me clean. Only you can make me clean.

In essence is what he is saying to the Lord. He knew his condition. He recognized his condition. He confronted his condition. And he came to the one and only person.

[28 : 26] He knew that could do anything about his condition. He came to Jesus on his knees imploring him. And begging him.

Knowing that this son of God had grace and mercy. And could do something for him. He knew his condition. The story is told.

Of a Prussian king. Called Frederick the Great. Now Frederick one day was touring a Berlin prison. And as he walked through the prison.

With the prison guards. All the men in the prison were coming up to King Frederick. And they were going on their knees before him. And they were proclaiming they're innocent. Oh king I am innocent.

Oh king I am innocent. There's been a terrible miscarriage of justice. I am so innocent. And they all did this. Apart from one man.

[29 : 30] One man remained completely silent. And Frederick was a wee bit confused. And he asked the man. And he says.

Why are you here? Why are you in this dungeon? And oh armed robbery your honour. Armed robbery. And are you guilty?

Oh yes indeed your majesty. I am guilty. I deserve my punishment. So Frederick then summoned the jailer. And said to the jailer. Release this guilty wretch at once.

I will not have him kept in this prison. And where he will corrupt all these fine innocent people. He knew his condition.

He knew he was guilty. A leper knew his condition. And he knew that he was guilty. Verse 41 tells us.

[30 : 32] That the Lord Jesus was moved with pity. He stretched out his hand and touched him. And said to him. I will be clean.

And what we see now is. We see the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus takes full control. Of this situation.

We see Lord Jesus take full control. And show to all that are there. That he is the master. And he is the commander.

Of all of these categories. That we were talking about. That he is the master. And he is the commander. Of all of these Old Testament categories.

That we were talking about earlier. And face to face. We have the pure. Sinless. Son of God.

[31 : 30] Face to face. With a man who knew. That he was unclean. A man who knew. He was guilty. The text tells us.

He was moved with pity. And it is probably the first time. In many a long year. That anyone. Had ever even listened.

To this man. The leper. The text tells us. That the Lord Jesus. Was filled. To the uttermost. With compassion.

You see the compassion. That the Lord Jesus. Jesus felt here. He felt it. In his stomach. The Lord is filled. With compassion.

Listen to David McKenna. Describe it this way. He says. It was not just. Mind for mind. Hand for hand. Or even heart for heart.

[32 : 23] 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. In our day and age. We talk about the heart. But in Jesus' day. They felt it in their stomach. Alexander McLaren.

Says he pitied. Not only in order. To teach us. The very heart of God. But because his own man's heart. Was touched. With a feeling of men's infirmities.

Not only does Jesus pity us. He understands us. He stretched out his hand. And touched him. And as one commentator says.

There was more than just. Superficial contact here. The phrase touched. Is often translated. And we could even translate it this way. He took hold of him.

[33 : 24] He had compassion for him. He pitied him. He took hold of him. You see Jesus. Wants the leper. And he wants you and I. Not only to hear his willingness.

To help us. And to save us. But he wants us to feel that willingness. To know that willingness. And that is what he does. For the leper. In essence. He is saying to the leper.

I understand you. And I love you. I will help you. He stretches out his hand. Across that wall of separation.

And what caused that wall of separation. Well it was sin. And it was shame. He stretched out his hand. Across that wall of separation. And he says.

I understand you. And I love you. And I am going to cleanse you. And that is what the Lord Jesus does. He doesn't have to touch him.

[34 : 22] In order to cleanse him. But he does. He took hold of him. You know we have to pause and sit back and marvel.

At the very humanness of the Lord Jesus here. The very humanness of the Son of God.

Who loved us. And gave himself for us. Hebrews teaches us. Therefore Jesus. He had to be made like his brothers.

In every respect the writer says. So that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest. In the service of God. To make propitiation for the sins.

The sins of the people. He understood. He understood. You see what we have here.

[35 : 25] Is an image of the incarnation. Of God becoming flesh. The incarnation. The one who would leave glory.

To seek and to save. That which was lost. Like a leper. Like you and me. You see. If there was no incarnation.

There would be no touch. If there had been no incarnation. There would have been no cleansing. No incarnation. There would be no healing.

There would be no salvation. There would be no glory. There would be no hope for sinners. But praise God. There is hope for sinners. Do you see what the Lord Jesus is saying to the leper.

And to me and you today. In essence. This is what he is saying. He is saying. I will swap places with you.

[36 : 23] I am pure. I am holy. I am holy. In fact. I am God. And I will swap places with you.

You see. I will become the one who is rejected. I will become the one who is lonely. I will be the one who will carry your sin and your shame.

And I will take it outside of the camp. Where you have come from. I will take it outside of the camp. And I will be crucified for you.

That is in essence what he is saying to the leper. And as Galatians teaches us. What does it teach us? Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.

By becoming a curse for us. For it is written. And he goes back to the Old Testament as Paul. Cursed is everyone who was hanged on a tree. You see. It was shameful to be hanged on a tree.

[37 : 22] But the Lord Jesus is saying. I will swap places with you. I will swap places. And do you remember all these categories that we were talking about earlier?

Well I'm going to be as bold as to say this. That our friend the leper. Were due to this divine appointment.

And due to the grace and the love that was in the Lord's heart for him. Our friend the leper has gone straight from the unclean. The category of the unclean. He has gone straight from that category.

And he has bypassed common. And he has bypassed every other category. And he has gone straight to holy. Why? Because the Lord has set him apart.

The Lord has set him apart. And how can I say that? Well listen to what Peter says in 2 Peter chapter 9. Listen to what Peter says. And listen very carefully.

[38 : 24] He says this to the Christians. He says, you are a chosen race. He says. You are a royal priesthood.

You are a holy nation. You are a person. You are a people for his own possession. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

And that is what has happened to the leper. He has gone from unclean. And he has gone to holy. Because the Lord God has said so. He has set him apart.

He says. You are a chosen race. You are a royal priesthood. You are a holy nation. You are a person. Dear leper. For the Lord God's own possession.

And now you are going to go and proclaim the excellencies of all that I have done for you. But then you will say to me, I know. But where we are still sinners at the same time?

[39 : 27] Absolutely. Because that is what the Lord does. When he takes a sinner. And he changes them.

And he molds them. We are taken from one category. And by the grace of God we are put into another category. We are set apart.

Because the Lord has set us apart. And as you sit at the Lord's table tomorrow. It is not you that has set you apart.

Or set me apart. It is the Lord God. That has set us apart. A people for his own possession.

Whatever the Lord God sets aside as holy is holy. You see. You see. If we were to talk theologically.

[40 : 33] We have both active and passive sanctification. Passive sanctification. Passive sanctification means that the Lord God has done it all for us in and through Jesus.

We are made holy. We are made holy. Because he has taken our shame and our punishment. Outside of the camp. We have swapped places with him.

And then we have active sanctification. Where the Lord comes into our lives. And he changes us. And he molds us. And he transforms us day by day.

And sometimes it is very hard. You see. What we are talking about here is justification. And I am going to close with this.

And outside of the scriptures. Church. I have found nowhere in any catechism or confession of faith. Anywhere as instructive and as beautiful.

[41 : 31] As question and answer number 60. In what is known as the Heidelberg Catechism. It was written by two young men in their 20s. At the time of the Reformation.

And they founded the University of Heidelberg. And it is one of the main pillars of Reformed Orthodoxy.

And they ask a question. And they ask this question. How are you righteous before God? Now when we look into our own hearts. What do we see? Well I see nothing but sin.

And darkness. But I know that the Lord is working in my life. And he is changing that heart of stone into a heart of flesh. How are you righteous before God?

How would you answer that? Well listen to their answer. They say. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Although my conscience accuses me.

[42 : 33] That I have grievously sinned. Against all God's commandments. And I have never kept any of them. And I am still inclined toward all evil.

Yet God. Yet God. Without any merit of my own. Out of mere grace. Imputes to me the perfect satisfaction.

Righteousness and holiness of Christ. He grants these to me. As if I had never had. Nor committed any sin. And 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. Did you catch that? Did you catch that?

As if I had never had. Nor committed any sin. And as if I myself had accomplished. All the obedience. Which Christ has rendered for me.

[43 : 35] He has swapped places with us. He has swapped places with us. The question is.

Will we accept this gift? Will we accept the grace that the Lord offers us today? If you are willing. You can make me clean.

So we can say today. Since we know Lord you are willing. Make me clean. Let us pray.

Eternal God.