

The Saviour's Response to a Leper's Plea

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 1, and reading again at verse 40.

And a leper came to him, that is, to Jesus. I have already stated in a recent prayer meeting that I conducted with part of you, that it is worth noting and remembering how the Gospel according to Mark begins.

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And the word Gospel literally means good news.

So now read the opening verse of this chapter and read it again. And when you do so, insert the words good news in place of the word Gospel.

Mark wants us to hear about good news. A particular brand or form of good news.

[1 : 15] Good news that focuses our attention on Jesus Christ. Because he is at the heart of the good news.

In short, he is the good news. So, in your reading of Mark's Gospel, it is always worthwhile to be looking for the good news.

To be asking yourself, what is the good news that Mark wants us to hear in each section of his Gospel. Mark tells us how Christ went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

And then he gives us this information about a meeting between an unnamed leprous man and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And a leper came to him. Now I wonder how you and I would react if we had gone to our doctor and the doctor told us that we were suffering from a disease or an illness that was terminal.

[2 : 28] And would be the means of our death. And then you returned to your home only to find a notice of eviction informing you that you had to vacate your property immediately and move outside the community where you resided.

The notice starkly states that you have a disfiguring disease which leaves you unclean. And that you can no longer therefore reside at your current address.

You can no longer continue to mingle and socialize with the community or anyone else for that matter. You cannot enter a place where people gather for worship or to socialize.

You are barred from being with your fellow beings in life. How would you feel? I think we would all feel pretty devastated, wouldn't we?

Facing a lonely exiled period of declining health with a horribly disfiguring illness that causes your flesh to die and drop off.

[3 : 50] That is the kind of scenario that confronted this nameless man. Some, wandering into the realm of speculation, with regard to the identity of this person, they wonder whether it might be Simon the leper.

A man who obviously at one time suffered from leprosy and who was healed from it and who is mentioned in the scriptures.

He is mentioned in the anointing of the Lord by Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. And one can speculate as to the identity.

But that is what it is. Just speculation. For the Bible does not confirm or reveal the identity of this man who comes to Jesus.

The Bible in the Old Testament sets out stringent regulations that govern the condition of leprosy.

And in Leviticus chapter 13, you will find this written, The leprosy person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes, let the hair of his head hang loose.

[5 : 16] 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 place shall be outside the camp. He is unclean. That is how a person with leprosy was viewed by the ceremonial law.

And you might be forgiven for thinking because of the emphasis on he in the passage, that it was a male-only illness.

But let me assure you that this illness affected both male and female. The Bible makes it clear that there were times when leprosy was the consequence of divine judgment.

And just to show that it was not confined to men only, Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, became a leper at one time when she was critical of Moses.

[6 : 29] In the book of Numbers, when the cloud was removed from the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous like snow. And Aaron turned toward Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.

And Aaron said to Moses, O my Lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes out of his mother's womb.

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, he also became a leper because of his covetousness.

King Uzziah, another example of leprosy because he tried to combine the office of king and priest.

And he was a leper, the Bible tells us, to the day of his death.

And being a leper, lived in a separate house, even although he was king, for he was excluded from the house of the Lord. So, you find many examples in the Bible of people who suffered from leprosy because of their disobedience.

[7 : 44] All who were lepers were exiled from their fellow men. And I want this morning just to look a little more closely at what Mark tells us.

And I've entitled this sermon, the Savior's response to a leper's plea. I'd like, first of all, to look at the account itself.

There are several factors that I want to highlight from the account. And the first is the plea of the leper. Matthew tells us that there was a great crowd assembled at this time.

And it's worth comparing the gospel narratives with one another. When you are looking at a passage from the gospels. When Jesus came down from the mountain, Matthew tells us, great crowds followed him, and behold, a leper came to him.

Luke tells us, while he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. So that through this large crowd comes this diseased leper, his appearance betraying his disease.

[9 : 04] And Luke, with his doctor's eye, tells us that the disease was in an advanced stage. Luke's description is very significant.

He was full of leprosy. Mark tells us, in the passage we read, that imploring him and kneeling said to him, if you will, you can make me clean.

Now, whatever one might say about this man's plea, I think you can read into it, his confidence in the power of Jesus to cleanse and heal from his leprosy.

There is no doubt in the mind of this man as to the power that belongs to Christ. If you will, you can make me clean.

It's not a question of power for this man. But it is a question, is Jesus willing to use that power to make him clean?

[10 : 12] Why does the leper express his plea in this way? Well, it is possible that no lepers had been healed before this time.

It's not a miracle that is spoken of often in the New Testament, although we know from the Bible that from the New Testament that ten lepers were healed at one point.

On the way to Jerusalem, as he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee, as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, master of mercy on us.

When he saw them, he said to them, go and show yourselves to the priests. And as they went, they were cleansed. There is no other mention in the New Testament of lepers being healed.

But when messengers came from John the Baptist, seeking confirmation as to the identity of Christ, are you the one who is to come?

[11 : 20] Or shall we look for another? Do you remember the response that Jesus gave to those inquirers? Go and tell John what you have seen and heard.

The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised up.

The poor of good news preach to them. Blessed is the one who is not offended by me. So it is possible that the miracle of healing a leper had not yet been done by Christ.

What we are told in the context is that he was preaching and casting out demons. We are also told that he healed many who were sick with various diseases.

And so, this leper may have been persuaded that therefore he could heal a leper. there is no doubt in the power of this miracle worker.

[12 : 23] You are the sovereign Lord. Your will is supreme. You determine everything in the universe and if you are willing, you are able to cleanse me and to heal me from my leprosy.

The second factor in the account itself is this, Christ's response. And his response is twofold.

By that I mean there is an outward response preceded by a new response. How do we know? Well, if you look at the context, Mark tells us that he was moved with pity.

How could this be known? How can you tell when someone is moved with pity? Did Jesus himself, did he inform the disciples that he was moved with pity?

Well, Mark doesn't tell that he did. But remember the role of Peter in the writing of this gospel. He is Mark's informer.

[13 : 36] Peter was present at the healing of this man. He would have seen the look that Christ gave this deceased person.

He would have seen how Jesus looked on this, at this mass of human misery afflicted by the debilitating disease of leprosy.

and you know our eyes are the window of the soul. You can tell much from looking into the eyes of a person. If you look them in the eye, you can tell a lot from what they are saying by looking into their eyes.

And the phrase that is translated here, moved with pity, speaks of the turbulence in the emotions of Jesus.

It speaks of his whole insides being moved as he viewed this wreck of humanity.

[14 : 47] We speak of our hearts being touched, but the Hebrews used the term that all their organs in the upper part of their torso was moved.

And that is the response of Jesus to the pitiable state of this man. When he was in the home of Simon and Andrew, we are told, at sundown, and it's significant, that evening at sundown, in other words, when the Sabbath, Jewish Sabbath had passed, they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.

And the whole city was gathered together at the door, and he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. But he was not hardened by the experience so that he was incapable of feeling compassion.

You know, those who are frequently in contact with different illnesses become almost immune to illness in the life of another.

They do not allow their emotions to become involved. It's the same in some other careers. It is said frequently that at funerals that the only people who are unmoved are the undertaker and the minister.

[16 : 08] I'm not sure that that's always strictly true, and I wouldn't like to say that it is strictly true of the medical profession either, that they do not allow their emotions to come into play when they are dealing with people who are acutely ill.

Given the nature of man, it is almost impossible not to have your emotions come into play at some time or another.

But here we are given an insight into the inner emotions of the God-man as he looked on this man in his abject helplessness.

He was not repulsed by this man's deplorable condition. He didn't turn away. And so Mark tells us of his outward response.

He stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean. Now, there are two things there. He touched and he spoke. If you were a spectator that day, I am sure that the first thing he did would have taken you completely by surprise.

[17 : 20] Here is an unclean man. If you as much came into contact with him, whoever slight the contact, you too were deemed unclean. And here is this leper in an advanced stage of leprosy, as

Luke has reminded us, he is full of leprosy, and Jesus touched him.

What looks of shock and horror would have crossed the faces of those who were in the crowd. He has touched the untouchable. And you know, it was not the touch that healed.

You could say that the loneliness of this man was alleviated by the touch of Jesus. How meaningful that can be either physically or metaphorically, and perhaps no more so than at this particular time of year when many are aware of acute loneliness.

loneliness in their own lives, and they succumb to loneliness. But it was the pronouncement of Christ that healed this man.

There is such power and authority in the pronouncement that is made. I will, says Jesus, be clean. The disease was banished by a word from Jesus, and so Mark tells us that the healing of restoration was instantaneous, and immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

[18 : 53] There is no time lapse. It's not gradual. It's immediate. Despite the way that he was disfigured by the disease, like Naaman of old, whom the Bible states with regard to his healing, not as Naaman's, his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

It's a very expressive and suggestive description that is set before us of the healing in the life of Naaman, where decayed flesh is restored like the flesh of a little child.

And I think there is a spiritual implication implied there that we are being told that it is akin to the new birth in the life of Naaman.

And so I would suggest that the healing in the life of this leprous man is also akin to the new birth in the life, in the instantaneous healing in the life of this man.

He is now once again the picture of health. And then we have in the account, the command of Jesus. And perhaps we don't fully appreciate how strongly Jesus spoke to this man.

[20 : 18] Jesus sternly charged him, that's how it's translated here, 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.

Now, here is someone who had been displayed marvelous compassion, depths of compassion, compassion, and now there is a sternness.

Jesus sternly charged him. And the word that is used here in the original is the word that would be used to describe scarcely controlled animal fury.

It's a surprising word that Mark uses in the original here, but it gives us an indication of the strength of feeling that lay behind the command that is given by Jesus.

The situation seems to have totally altered, and it's worth noting too how the double negative is used to further emphasize what Jesus asks of this man.

[21 : 26] See that you say nothing to anyone. Literally, see that you say nothing to no one. He was to go and show himself to the priest. He was to follow the instructions as detailed in the law of Moses.

Why does Christ treat the man in this way? Well, one explanation is that the high priest did not accept Jesus for who he was, and by sending this man directly to the high priest, it would show the regard that Christ had for Old Testament Scripture, and the priest would hear the story directly from the healed man.

It would be further evidence of who Christ was. And so we have the disobedience of this healed man. He went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news.

Did he ever go to the priest? I can't tell you. The Bible doesn't say. What the Holy Spirit puts emphasis on is his disobedience and the repercussions that resulted from the disobedience of this man.

For the consequence were that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter. Jesus could no longer go into the synagogue.

[22 : 46] He could no longer preach in such places. Like John the Baptist, he was out in desolate places, and to there the people flock to. That is the account itself.

The plea of the leper, the response of Jesus, the command of Christ, the disobedience of the healed leper. There may have been selective hearing on the part of the leper, but what does that say to us?

What can we deduce from the leper's plea? Well, I would suggest we can deduce this, that there was faith in the leper's plea.

It seems to me that this man is an example of faith and action. Without faith, the Bible tells us it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists, that he rewards those who seek him.

And here this man had been compelled to leave his community, to live in isolation. He had every reason to stay away from Christ.

[23 : 55] His life was one of lonely exile. He could empathize with the words of the psalmist, what we have sung and read today, my lovers and my friends, to stand a distance from my sword, and those to stand aloof that were kinsmen unkind before.

He might well have been thinking, well, maybe Christ will cross my path in some way. But from Mark's information, it appears that this man was not prepared to wait for such an eventuality to take place.

What Mark tells us is this, the leopard came to him. He comes right through the crowd and you don't need powers of imagination to imagine how the crowd would have parted as people jostled to get out of the way of this man who is crying out unclean, unclean.

Mark does not tell us that faith caused this man to approach Jesus, but from the language employed, it strongly suggests that faith was an exercise and a leopard comes to him.

Mark is telling us how this man is determined to seek the blessing of healing and restoration. Note, not on his own terms, but on Jesus' terms.

[25 : 20] Oh, how many fall into the way of thinking, let me have healing, but let me have it on my terms? There's no mention of that here.

He might be publicly rebuked for coming in this way, but he is prepared to face that if only he can be healed. In some ways, he's like the woman with the blood condition, who, you remember, came behind Jesus and reached out her finger to touch the very edge of his cot, as she speaks to herself, and hopes that she might receive instantaneous healing.

Whatever was an obstacle, this man was not going to be deterred. Well, if you were here today, are you one who were seeking Christ, and wanting Christ at all costs, whatever the obstacles that may be placed in your path.

I don't think it would be too bold of me to state that the leper is in many ways like Jacob of old, who, when a man wrestled with him in the darkness of that black night, Jacob is compelled to say, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

And here is this leprous man, earnestly seeking healing and blessing and restoration from the Lord Jesus. So, his approach suggests faith, and it tells us how submissive his faith was.

[27 : 11] If you will, you can make me clean. at this stage, Christ had not spoken one word to him by way of encouragement or discouragement. But in the submissiveness of his faith, can't you hear how he has no doubt whatsoever about the power of the Savior.

And it's as if he is saying, I am throwing myself on the lap of your mercy, confident in the ability of your power. Now, that doesn't mean to say that God gives us everything that we seek.

There are many things that we seek in our foolishness and in our short-sightedness. And God is wise and he knows what is good for us and what is not good for us.

You remember how Paul had the thorn in the flesh and how he prayed three times to take the thorn away. But God knew what was good for Paul.

He knew the benefits that would accrue to Paul by leaving the thorn there. Painful, yes. Hurtful, yes.

[28 : 29] Many times perhaps praying for grace to bear with the thorn, yes. the Lord knows what is best for you and me and often it may be very contrary to what we think is best for us in our providence, in our day-to-day living.

But he knows what is best for you and me. And you remember how the Lord himself is a primary example of submitting his will to the will of the father as he took the cup that was proffered to him in the garden, not my will, but thy will be done.

And it seems to me there is that in the faith of this man, but there is something else. There is unwise zeal in the life of this man.

Because when you reflect on the action of this man, he was exceeding the revealed will of the Lord. Jesus was asking something of him which is rather contrary to nature.

Here is a man who had been segregated from society because of his illness. And now that he has been healed so miraculously and wonderfully so perfectly would it not be the most natural thing in the world to tell about his restoration of health, his new found health.

[30 : 09] But remember what Mark tells us here. The directive given by Christ is very explicit. There is no room for ambiguity. There is no wriggle room. 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. And this man goes out like some kind of herald to proclaim what took place and who had healed him. Did he mean to impede the spread of the gospel?

Or did he think that by his actions he could accelerate the spread of the gospel? Well my response might be uncharitable but I am not sure that this man did think.

I am not sure that he did think. He had selective hearing. He probably thought that if indeed he did, if he did think, which is dubious, but let's give him the benefit of the doubt.

Surely he could say this will be of great help that others hear of this fantastic miracle worker. But you see the emphasis of the section of the passage and the emphasis is that of the Holy Spirit, it's not mine, but he went out and began to talk freely about it to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in desolate places.

[31 : 39] He was commanded to be silent until he had first gone to the priest. That was the express instruction he had received. He was going to do it in his way, not in God's way.

And the lesson that I see here is this, that we are all prone to think that we know better than God, and that we can evangelize in our way.

But is it in accord with God's way? Is it in accord with God's way? This man was of the view that it was better to give a deaf ear to the command of Christ than to obey.

And it was not the prerogative of this man to sit in judgment on the command that was given to him, it was his duty to obey the instruction of Christ.

God does not need our unwise zeal, unholy zeal, which disobeys the will of Christ. To further the knowledge of Christ undermines the knowledge of Christ.

[32 : 58] And it's worth reflecting on that. Because we are all prone to do things that we think might accelerate the spread of the gospel, and perhaps we are doing more harm than good, in our newfound zeal and enthusiasm for sharing the message.

Well, that's my second point, what we can deduce from the leper's plea. His faith, his submissiveness of his faith, and his unwise seed. And finally, because the time is going, the good news that arises from the Savior's response.

Much, as I said, is spoken of leprosy in the Bible. In fact, more is said about leprosy than any other form of illness in the Bible.

It's a picture or an illustration of the devastating effect of the power of sin in the life of man. By nature, because of sin, we are unclean.

We are unclean in the sight of a holy God. Just as the leper was cut off from society, so the sinner is cut off from a holy God on account of our sin.

[34 : 16] And the good news is, despite our spiritual uncleanness, Christ is able to heal. If this man had denied his condition, which was so obvious to everyone else, he would not have experienced restoration to health.

death. But he comes to Jesus, acutely aware of his unclean state, acutely aware of his disfiguring leprosy. And he comes to one who states, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Those who are well, those who do not consider themselves to be unclean and impure, then they do not see any need of a savior. And Jesus hasn't come to those.

But this man freely acknowledges his deplorable situation, the ceremonial law prescribed in detail as how leprosy was to be viewed, and we are reminded in the scriptures that it is through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

The law convicts us of our sin. It scrutinizes our lives. We may not like the law scrutinizing our lives. We may not like the law focusing upon our hearts and bringing the spotlight of the truth of God to bear upon the intimacy of our lives.

[35 : 41] Makes us distinctly uncomfortable. And you may have sat many times under the sound of a very evangelistic address when the law was placing the spotlight upon the intimacy of your life and you felt distinctly uncomfortable under the preaching of that kind of sermon.

But you see, when the law comes with power and conviction, it sets before you the ugliness of your heart. You begin to discover the uncleanness that is in your life and your need of grace and the

cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb.

And so in this encounter, note of the good news supremely comes across. In my view, the emphasis is placed here on the greatness and the graciousness of the heart of the Savior. That was the very source of the act of healing. He was moved with pity. What proved to be a deterrent to other people in coming close to this man who is a leper and unclean, these were the very issues that evoked compassion in the heart of the Savior.

And when we touched him, we see the effect of this great compassion. He reaches out to this needy man. And so today, if you are aware of your sin, your need of salvation, no matter how greatly you may consider you have sinned, how often you have spurned the truth, this Savior's heart is still full of compassion in order to pour out his mercy.

[37 : 24] The Bible tells us he is rich in mercy. He is rich in mercy. It is inexhaustible, there is no end to it, you don't have to worry that it will be exhausted.

And if you are asking the question, is it sufficient to meet with my need, I tell you, yes! The fund of divine riches, of mercy more than adequately needs, meets the beggarly needs of impoverished sinners.

There are no limitations to its benevolence. Jesus did not fear being made unclean, he identifies with sinners, and he is still the same.

That's why he came into the world, that's why he experienced the humiliation, temptation that he experienced. He came in contact with uncleanness, remained pure, in order to remove uncleanness out of my life, and out of yours.

He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, for our sake he is made to be sinned, and you know sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. He came so close to sin, that only God alone knows how close he came to sin and remained pure, wholly innocent, unstained, separate from sinners.

[38 : 58] And today, he is still receiving leprous men and women and boys and girls, who come in the depths of their need, disfigured by the power of sin.

And he pronounces such lives to be clean and made whole. How, my friend, would you not like to meet this one who is a wonderful miracle worker, who today deals so graciously, so mercifully, and so lovingly with unworthy, disfigured, leprous figures like me and you?

let us pray. Eternal and ever-blessed one, we pray today for grace to come in the depth of our need, to the one alone who is able to meet with all who needs according to the graciousness of his infinite grace.

all blessed to us our meditation on thy truth, and the glory shall be thine. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Let us conclude by singing to his praise from Psalm 103, page 135 of the Psalter.

Psalm 103, page 135 of the Psalter. The beginning of the Psalm, Praise God my soul, with all my heart let me exalt his holy name.

[40 : 44] Forget not all his benefits, his praise my soul, in song proclaim. The Lord forgives you all your sins and heals your sickness and distress.

Your life he rescues from the grave, crowns you in his tenderness. He satisfies your deep desires from his unending stores of good, so that just like the eagle's strength, your youthful vigor is renewed.

The Lord is known for righteous acts and justice to downtrodden ones. To Moses he made known his ways, his mighty deeds, to Israel's sons.

Let us sing these verses. Psalm 103, page 135. Praise God, praise God. Praise God, my soul, with all my heart, let me exalt his holy name, forget the knowledge, benefits, grace, this days my soul in song proclaim.

The Lord more gives you all your sins, and gives your sickness and distress, your life he rescues from the grave, and crowns you in his tenderness, and crowns you in his tenderness.

[42 : 34] He satisfies your deep desires, from this unending source of good, so not just like the eagles' strength, your youthful vigor is renewed.

The Lord is known for righteous acts, and justice to the rotten ones, to mortals he made known his ways, his mighty deeds to Israel's sons, his mighty deeds to Israel's sons.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you all, now and forever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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