

MATTHEW 8:1-4 CLEAN!

When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.

Then Jesus put out His hand, and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

But go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.

Have you ever needed a clean pair of socks, a clean sheet of paper, or a clean spot on the desk for an important paper? Having a clean bill of health and a clean criminal record are highly desirable too. In our text for today we see a man in need of "cleaning"—of cleansing.

Prior to our text, Jesus had finished His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Matthew wrote, *And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (7:28-29)*. The crowd had heard astonishing truths of God, spoken with authority by Jesus! Jesus said, *I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20)*. In other words, "You have to be better than the scribes and the Pharisees to get yourself to heaven! Even they are not good enough." Astonishing! Jesus also had said, *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (6:33)*. "God's righteousness is what is needed. His righteousness is something outside of self. It is from Him--forgiveness in His Promised Savior and Son." No wonder *Great multitudes followed Him* when He came down from the mountain!

In the midst of this joyous crowd, a leper approached Jesus. A "leper" is not "leopard." A leopard is an animal from the large cat family, with spots, living in Africa, India, and Asia. A "leper" is a person with the sickness called "leprosy." Leprosy is still around today in tropical and subtropical climates. About one hundred cases per year are diagnosed in the U.S. Today leprosy is called "Hansen's Disease." It is caused by bacteria that affect the skin. The skin becomes rough, scabby, and scale-like. It turns white. Raw flesh may appear. It is very unsightly. Leprosy is not contagious by touch, but by droplets of water from the mouth. God gave strict rules in the Old Testament for lepers. They had to live away from the rest of the people. They had to cry out, "Unclean!" as they approached others. To be re-admitted into society, after healing, involved a great deal of detail carried out by the priests (Leviticus 13-14). The great concern was not just a matter of isolating the disease, but displaying God's attitude toward imperfection. It is not acceptable.

This unsightly "unclean" leper approached Jesus. Perhaps he had a shawl or a mantle over his body or even over his head to hide his sorry state from public view. Who likes to see a case of chicken pox or poison ivy walking down the street? The man came and *worshiped* Jesus—which means he bowed down or perhaps was lying down on his face, in humility and helplessness before Jesus, the Lord. Maybe he raised his face to look to Jesus as he spoke. *Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.* He confessed Jesus as Lord and God. He confessed that ALL help—physical and spiritual—does come, from Him. The leper did not demand help from Jesus, but submitted himself and his condition to Jesus and Jesus' all-loving, all-knowing, and almighty will. *Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.*

That is how every sinner rightly approaches the Lord, with each problem—humbly seeking His help. In the end the sinner cannot help himself before God. Sometimes it takes a while to come to that conclusion! The help we need is physical—help for body or help for the minds. Blood sugar issues, blockage in the veins or arteries, loss of bone density, gout, cancer, beclouded thoughts, difficulties making a decision, emotional distress. Jesus is the one who helps. He helps directly, or through the help and medicine of others. Besides physical help, we also need spiritual help before Him—an issue which we are so likely to "duck." There are many faults—failures to keep and do His will—sins of habit, sins of boldness, sins of weakness, sins against strangers, sins against family, sins against spouses. Guilty! Guilty! In God's sight we are but undesirable "lepers"—Unclean! Unclean! Cry out, "Lord, help me." His forgiveness for spiritual leprosy is present always in Jesus. His help for physical "leprosy" is granted as He in His love knows best.

Jesus put out His hand. Jesus willingly reached out to help the leper. He willingly reaches out to help you. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He “bought you back” on the cross. He paid the price to rescue you. He still goes the extra mile for you! ----- Jesus *touched* the leper. So much is conveyed in a touch—friendship, concern, love—which words cannot express. A mom can soothe her child all she wants with words, but until she wraps her arms around the little one, that the child finds no comfort. Jesus touched the leper. Did He touch his clothes, or his skin—face or hands? Who would touch the skin of a leper? Jesus would. Jesus reaches out to touch you. He touches your sin-sick body and soul with relief, comfort, healing and forgiveness. “Come to Me and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). ----- Jesus also *spoke* to the leper, communicated with him verbally. He communicates verbally with you in His Word. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 21:4). “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). “My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness” (II Corinthians 12:9-10). “You shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29). And many others. ----- Teaching out, touching, and speaking, Jesus comforted the needy leper. He does the same for you.

He said to the leper, *I am willing; be cleansed. Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.* An on-the-spot healing! No drawn-out process of treatment. Jesus simply fixed it! Sometimes He does use a process for our physical ailments. The natural healing of the body does not happen overnight. The medical assistance that one receives through doctors, dentists, chiropractors, therapists—really from God—involves a process. But not here! The leper was suddenly healed and cleansed. If he were looking at his arms, he could have seen the instant change!

Jesus’ cleansing for your soul involves no process. There is not a beginning of forgiveness today, then a little more tomorrow, and maybe in two years all will be forgiven. The Lord justifies straight-out! Full and complete healing from sin immediately--by faith in Jesus’ name! Imagine being charged and guilty of twenty different counts in court. The judge’s sentence would involve many years of jail time, classes to attend, probation, restitution. But imagine being suddenly and completely justified—declared NOT GUILTY—on all counts! Talk about a springboard of relief, peace, joy, and thanks! Or imagine having a bad case of chicken pox or poison ivy, and walking into the doctor’s examining room, receiving one dose of “something” from the doctor, and walking out with skin and complexion clear as a new born baby! In Jesus your soul is just so fully and completely healed. I can and do tell you today, or any day hereafter, in Jesus your record is clear! Done! Such mercy without end!

Jesus said to him, “See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” What’s all this secrecy about? Doesn’t Jesus want us to spread the Good News, the Gospel, of healing and forgiveness in His Name? Indeed, He does! Here, however, we conclude, that Jesus did not want the miraculous physical cure to become the whole point. The miracle would certainly garner ooh’s and aah’s, generating a lot of emotional enthusiasm. But enthusiasm and wonder for the healing alone does not convey the point of God’s overriding cleansing from sin in Christ. If Christianity is only emotion, it has no deep foundation for rough times. Perhaps this man walked out of the crowd with a mantle still over his head, not because he was ashamed of his healing in Jesus, but because Jesus meant so much more than just a solution for physical woes.

Go your way, Jesus said, *show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.* Jesus instructed the man to go back to his previous life and to follow the process of being declared whole, healed, and clean by the priests at the temple. Although there was direct intervention by Jesus with his ailment, this miraculous cure did not exempt him from his responsibilities to the rules of the day and society. He was to go his way and live with thanks in his heart for each new—truly new—day, serving the Lord and others in his specific station in life.

Jesus has intervened in your life too with various miraculous physical solutions to physical problems AND with the overriding spiritual solution of your sin problem. You are not somehow now exempt, and free to living your life in society under your own rules and will. Do not be so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good. . . not an expression from the Bible.

Leave God’s house of worship today, where Jesus has again touched your heart and your soul, where Jesus has touched the lips and the mouths of those who receive the Lord’s supper. Go home refreshed in your cure and cleansing. Serve your Savior this week. “Park” the fits of rage, the words of anger, the cases of impatience, the hours of worry. In Jesus you have found more than a clean pair of sock, a clean sheet of paper, or a clean space on the desk. You have been given a clean and righteous record, before the Lord!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---