

Matthew 8:1-4: When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. ² And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." ³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them."

Intro: Do you know what it feels like to be dirty, unwanted, untouchable, or extremely lonely? Joseph Merrick (The Elephant Man), born August 5, 1862. Early in life he developed extreme deformities that were frightening for most people to look at. He couldn't hold jobs because people were too frightened to look at him. Around the age of 15, he was mistreated & abandoned by his father & step-mother. He got a job as a human curiosity exhibit until finally one of his promoters mistreated him, robbed him, & abandoned him. Finally, he ended up in a hospital to spend his final years in peace. He died at age 27, he wanted sleep like normal people & they think he broke his neck when he was sleeping lying down instead of sitting up. One of Merrick's friend said he always wanted to go to a hospital for the blind where he might find a woman who would not be repelled by his appearance & love him.

1. Someone Greater Than Moses Is Here

Matthew 8:1: When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.

- **Exodus 4:6-8:** the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷ Then God said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸ "If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign.

- **Exodus 4:29-31:** Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel.

³⁰ Aaron **spoke all the words** that the LORD had spoken to Moses and **did the signs** in the sight of the people.

³¹ And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

- **Numbers 12:13:** And Moses cried to the LORD, "O God, please heal her - please."

2. An Unclean, Rejected, Lonely, But Hopeful Man

Matt. 8:2: & behold, a leper came to him & knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

a. He was a leper: One Dr. describes leprosy: The hair falls from the head and eye-brows; the nails loosen, decay and drop off; joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up and slowly fall away. The gums are absorbed, and the teeth disappear. The nose, the eyes, the tongue and the palate are slowly consumed. (Like the walking dead)

Leviticus 13:45-46: The leprous 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 the camp.

No contact with loved ones, no worship with God's people, no fellowship with people: Utterly cast out and lonely!

MacArthur: (Quoting a rabbi) "Upwind a leper can come within six feet of a person, downwind, 150 feet." Josephus wrote that "Lepers were treated as if they were living dead men, corpses." In Israel they were barred from the city of Jerusalem all together, & all walled cities. And if they did enter any other place, they had to keep those distances. If a leper came near a synagogue, he would be rejected & sent to a small holding room until they could deal with him later. Rabbis used to pride themselves in avoiding lepers. One rabbi said, "He wouldn't eat an egg purchased on a street where a leper had walked." Another rabbi prided himself at throwing stones at lepers.

Leprosy was associated with sin, disobedience, and God's judgment: Miriam was struck with leprosy (Numbers 12); Uzziah, King of Judah, did what only a priest should do – he was struck with leprosy So lepers were lonely, outcasts, looked down upon, and cast out from among God's people!

Leprosy was part of the curse of the law: Deuteronomy 28:15, 22, 27: But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you . . . The LORD will strike you with wasting disease . . . The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed.

We have all, at one time, been spiritual lepers? Apart from Jesus Christ we are leprous with the leprosy of sin!

Isaiah 64:6: We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

Physical healings in the Bible point us to our greater need for spiritual healing: 1 Peter 2:24: 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. (We are helpless and uncleanable like this leper, and we cannot do anything to save ourselves!) **GOSPEL!**

- **Isaiah 1:18:** Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
- **Revelation 7:13-14:** Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

b. This leper was hopeful: He came to Jesus! He begged Jesus for help! He recognized Jesus' authority. He believed Jesus could heal an incurable disease! He knelt down and called Jesus Lord! He knew Jesus' will is done!

He said: "Lord, **if you will**, you can make me clean." Notice he didn't come naming and claiming it!

Derek Thomas: It tickles me and then it annoys me, preachers who believe that healing is part of the promise of the atonement and of the gospel. And they'll stand there and they'll preach, and say, "Jesus doesn't want you to be sick," and they're wearing glasses and they've got fillings in their teeth and wrinkles in their skin and their hair is falling out, and they're aging and they're dying before you, because we're all dying. It's a silly doctrine. It's an altogether silly doctrine, because if there was healing in the atonement, we'd never die!

It's OK, to say "If it's your will Lord!" It's not just OK, it's righteous and good and humble and Biblical!

c. How should we think about God's will & healing? Daniel 3:16-18: Shadrach, Meshach, & Abed-nego answered & said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, & he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

3. The Clean Of Clean – The LORD Jesus Christ

Matthew 8:3: And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

a. Jesus' action: Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him; You don't do this! You become unclean if you do this! But Jesus touches the unclean, and they become clean! He takes our uncleanness that we might be clean!

Jesus says: "I will; be clean!" And it's immediately all gone!! His leprosy was all cleansed away!

Jesus taught, and Jesus acts! His Word is accompanied by signs and wonders, confirming His Words!

b. Jesus' pity, compassion, and love: Jesus' had a heart for the brokenness in this world. He has a heart for individual people. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, and he wept for people! He still weeps for people!

Jesus can do that with your sin as well! He's the King of kings, and He's the Clean of clean!

He's brighter than the brightest bright!

He's purer than the transparent gold that lines the streets of the celestial city!

He'll make the best washing soap in the universe look dirty!

He's clearer than the most precious crystal!

He sparkles more than the greatest most twinkling diamond that has ever been discovered in this world!

He shines stronger than the sun at full strength!

He's unblemished!; He's unpolluted!; And He's unsmudged!

He's unsoiled!; He's unspotted!; And He's unstained!

He's unsullied!; He's untarnished!; And He's uninfected!

He's unclouded!; He's spotless!; And He's flawless!

He's faultless!; He's complete!; And He's whole!

He's stainless! and He's immaculate!

And if He wills, everyone He touches – no matter what's been done in the past and no matter how sinful, dirty, rotten, putrid, or unclean you are – **YOU WILL BECOME CLEAN BECAUSE HE IS THE CLEAN OF CLEAN!**

Cowper: There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins

And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

- The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day

And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.

Jesus is on the scene as the greater second and last Adam, fixing everything the first Adam messed up. He's showing His power, His deity, His messianic calling, and His fulfillment of the law!

c. We should desire to be in contact with sinners like Jesus! Evangelism; Discipleship; Smell like sheep

- **Geoff Chang:** As reports of the coronavirus spread around the world, pastors and church leaders are discussing how they should respond to the outbreak. Throughout church history, many pastors have had to think through similar challenges. As a young village preacher, Charles Spurgeon admired the Puritan ministers who stayed behind to care for the sick and dying during the Great Plague of London in 1665. Now in the fall of 1854, the newly called pastor of the New Park Street Chapel in London found himself pastoring his congregation amid a major cholera outbreak in the Broad Street neighborhood just across the river.

- **Spurgeon:** I was returning mournfully home from a funeral, when, as God would have it, my curiosity led me to read a paper which was wafered up in a shoemaker's window . . . in a good bold handwriting, these words: — "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." The effect upon my heart was immediate. Faith appropriated the passage as her own. I felt secure, refreshed, girt with immortality. I went on with my visitation of the dying, in a calm and peaceful spirit; I felt no fear of evil, and I suffered no harm. The Providence which moved the tradesman to place those verses in his window, I gratefully acknowledge; and in the remembrance of its marvelous power, I adore the Lord my God.

- **Geoff Chang:** Here, Spurgeon does not promise that no Christian will ever die of sickness. Rather, the Christian "[needs] not dread [sickness], for he has nothing to lose, but everything to gain, by death." Once again, pastors must exercise wisdom & take appropriate precautions as they visit those who are dying. At the same time, **our security cannot be in those precautions, but it must be in God.** As we entrust our lives to God & faithfully carry out our responsibilities, we have an opportunity to demonstrate what hope & peace look like in the midst of death.

4. Jesus' Command To Say Nothing About This Good News

Matthew 8:4: And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them."

a. Jesus commanded silence: Jesus didn't want to be misunderstood. He didn't want people coming to Him merely for physical healing (as a wonder worker) or as the military leader who would crush the Romans, but He wanted the people to hear His Words! He and His Words give eternal life! Jesus wanted people to rightly understand Who He was and what He came to do. And Jesus had a timetable for His mission. It wasn't time yet for Him to fully disclose the whole truth about Himself – He could be arrested and killed prematurely:

John 2:4: My hour has not yet come; **John 7:30:** So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come; **John 8:20:** no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come; **John 12:23:** The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified

b. Jesus commanded obedience to the Mosaic law: Verse 4: show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.

- **France:** 1) This act will give public proof that the leper is cured and may return into society; 2) it will prove to the (presumably already hostile) priests that Jesus respects the Old Testament law; 3) it is a witness to Jesus' Messianic mission, as the conqueror of disease.

- **Fesko:** Something far greater and far more powerful than the law has come! The law couldn't cleanse! Jesus fulfills the law! The law points to Him!

Romans 8:3-4: For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

c. Thankfully, we have no such restriction on our praises of our Master and His work: 1 Peter 2:9: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Hymn: O for a thousand tongues to sing; My great Redeemer's praise
The glories of my God and King; The triumphs of His grace!

- My gracious Master and my God; Assist me to proclaim

To spread through all the earth abroad; The honors of Thy name!

- Jesus! the name that charms our fears; That bids our sorrows cease

'Tis music in the sinner's ears; 'Tis life, and health, and peace!

d. Jesus is our Substitute: Notice where the leper began in our text and where Jesus began. And notice where the leper ends in our text and where Jesus ends! This is the great exchange! He is our great Substitute!

Sinclair Ferguson: If you want to know what lies at the heart of the Christian Gospel: Jesus became what He was not, in order that we might become what we were not. Jesus took what is ours in order that we might share what is His. The clean Jesus becomes unclean so that the unclean lepers can become clean! (The Cross; 2 Cor. 5:21)

Christ Jesus Is The Clean Of Clean
His Touch For Lepers None Had Seen
He Reached For What's To Us Obscene
In Love To Cleanse And Not Demean
For On That Cross We've Heard The Scene
Where He Was Struck, Alone, Unclean
To Bear God's Wrath That Came Between

Our Father And His Loved Supreme
Christ Died And Rose To Intervene
By Faith We're Cleansed To The Extreme
No More Alone Embraced Serene
He'll Touch You Too And Make You Clean
He Came For Sinners To Redeem
His Blood A Mighty, Cleansing Stream!