

Series: Making Much of the Master

THE HEALING OF THE LEPER

MAT 8:2-4 MAR 1:40-45 LUK 5:12-15

Text: Mark 1:40-45

Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰ *And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.* ⁴¹ *And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.* ⁴² *And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.* ⁴³ *And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;* ⁴⁴ *And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.* ⁴⁵ *But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.*

Introduction:

By the time we come to verse 40 of this chapter we find the Lord turning aside from Capernaum to reach out with the gospel into the towns round about.

Verse 39 tells us that:

Mark 1:39

³⁹ And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

This was at the heart of His ministry.

Luke 4:18-19

¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, ¹⁹ To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And so shunning the role of celebrity in Capernaum, he reached out into the neighboring towns and cities to call men to repentance and faith, and bid them enter His kingdom.

While in route, we read that he encountered a leper.

We know it had to be in route, because lepers were forbidden to enter city, so the events of verse 40 onwards must have occurred in the countryside, somewhere between towns and synagogues.

This is a telling encounter.

It reveals the mercy of Christ for those who are suffering.

Let's consider the cleansing of this man, which was the sixth miracle of the Lord beginning with:

1. THE TEARS OF THE LEPER – (VS 40)

Mark 1:40

⁴⁰ And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

A. In ancient times the disease of leprosy was considered by Jews as the “judgment of God”.

- It was the kiss of death, and though the term covered all kinds of skin disease, but the disease of leprosy was feared beyond all other forms of illness.
- For sure it was a dreadful state.
- In essence a leper was a dead man walking, his body full of contamination and corruption.
- As he wandered the highways he would cry out “Unclean, unclean!”

- He was forbidden contact with His family, refused entry to functions and forbidden to participate in the feasts of Israel.
- Physically the disease began with a numbness in the fingers, the feet or the limbs, but little by little as the disease took grip his body would begin to rot, and ultimately the man would look like a decaying corpse with rotting stumps for limbs, and a haunted gaze that stared out from behind filthy linens.
- A leper was without hope and without help. His life was all but over. He had nothing to live for and nowhere to go. He was cut off from family, friends and fellowship.
- No wonder leprosy is a type of sin.
- Sin too starts small, but soon it so corrupts a man as to govern his entire being and to lead him to a place of total separation from all that is good, indeed from God Himself.

B. Now in truth he did something here that he was not permitted to do – he approached another person, and in so doing risked the spread of leprosy.

Yet, it seems that this man had heard of Jesus somehow, that He knew the Lord had the power to heal Him.

Mark tells us

Mark 1:40

⁴⁰ *And there came a leper to him, **beseeking him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.***

He knew that the Lord could help Him, and from His point of view he had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

That is true of anyone coming to Christ.

- Yet the devil always turns that on its head.
- Many who contemplate conversion speak of having to give this up or that up.
- Let us be clear about this: There is no loss in coming to Jesus.
- Yes some things will change, yes repentance calls upon me to turn from sin – but sin is no more a gain than leprosy was a blessing.

- This man came humbly before the Lord, he came asking, he came worshipping, and he came believing.
- He came surrendered to whatever the Lord had for him, and through his tears he was heard to say, “If thou wilt...”
- This was no “Name and claim it” theology.
- He didn’t come demanding, he didn’t come commanding God.
- He came with an obvious need, and He submitted that need humbly at the feet of Jesus.

Note not only “The Tears of the Leper” but also:

2. THE TOUCH OF THE LORD – (VSS. 41-42)

Mark 1:41-42

⁴¹ ***And Jesus, moved with compassion***, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. ⁴² And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

A. “And Jesus, moved with compassion...”

Isn’t that a wonderful truth of Christ?

Only Mark shares that with us in this particular account, but how often do we read that Jesus was “moved with compassion.”

Hebrews 4:15

¹⁵ For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin.

He feels for us.

He cares for our needs.

He has walked where we walk, and He knows all about our sufferings.

B. Now we read that the Lord, “... put forth his hand, and touched him...”

Mark 1:41-42

⁴¹ *And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.* ⁴² *And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.*

Touching him was equivalent to suicide to most people!

Yet, we know that He is Lord over disease, and even over death, so that even though this man was, according to Luke's account, full of leprosy, a repulsive sight, the Lord could connect with Him and remain unaffected by his illness.

That touch was undoubtedly the first human contact that man had experienced in a long time.

- But then Jesus did something else... He spoke, "saith unto him, I will; be thou clean."
- And notice that the cure was instant and comprehensive.

There was no waiting period, no progressive healing, it was immediate and complete.

Note not only "The Tears of the Leper" and the "Touch of the Lord" but lastly:

3. THE TESTIMONY OF A LIFE – (VSS. 43-45)

Mark 1:43-45

⁴³ *And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;* ⁴⁴ *And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.* ⁴⁵ *But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.*

A. Now we come to perhaps the most interesting part of this story, where we read:

“And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away.”

The Greek suggests that the Lord was very direct and somewhat stern in the charge that he gave this man.

He told him in no uncertain terms, “See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”

This surprises us!

We are conditioned to speak out for the Lord, constantly we are banging on the Great Commission drum encouraging one another to tell others of Christ, but this man is explicitly told NOT to tell!

How come?

Notice he is told to show what was done, rather than to shout about it, and that by his actions he would be a testimony on to the priests.

There are a number of reasons why this might be.

- His mission and purpose was to preach – remember this was His determination after spending the morning in prayer.
- Secondly, He did not wish to arouse the resentments of the religious rulers prematurely. He was seeking no controversy.
- Thirdly, it may be He was looking out for the man, as association with Christ might have skewed the judgment of the priests in their consideration of his cleansing.

That said the man's healing was to be a testimony.

You know sometimes people just need some space to grow as believers before we ask them to speak out.

The church needs to be careful about creating heroes out of baby Christians.

If a celebrity is saved, we want to put them on a platform, and tout them all over the country.

I don't think the Lord would have done that.

Sometimes a change needs to be seen, before it's heard.

Also the law required anyone cleansed of leprosy (any skin disease) to present themselves at the temple where they would go through various examinations and ceremonies to establish their healthiness before being officially declared clean.

Remember:

The Lord had come to fulfil the law, and so He quite rightly pointed this man to Jerusalem to present himself to the priest according to the law.

The Lord was not only fulfilling the law; He was establishing a testimony.

The leper in our story took little notice of Jesus' stern face and tone and, "went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter."

Every time I read this I wonder what it is in us that cause us always to do the opposite of what the Lord asks.

- This man is told to tell no one, and he tells everyone; we are told to tell everyone, yet our instincts are often to tell no one!
- I have often thought the gospel might sooner have been published had the Lord told us to be quiet about it.

Certainly we can sympathize with this poor man.

Having been a leper so long, it must surely have been hard for him to contain himself.

Sometimes we may allow our zeal to cause us to let go of our sense. You see, there are times when it is wise to speak, and other times when wisdom dictates silence.

What this man did, in his unbridled enthusiasm, was to hinder the work of the Lord.

Mark 1:38

³⁸ And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.

Mark 1:45

⁴⁵ But he went out, and began to publish *it* much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

Notice, that though the Lord's intent was to "go into the next towns" and "preach there also," (vs. 38) the result of this man's broadcast was that He, "could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places."

Sometimes, we must confess, that we behave like we know better than God.

The Lord has shown us how His work is to be done, yet often we feel that we can be more effective, so we downplay preaching (though it is God's chosen method) in favour of various means of entertainment, (Music, comedy, drama etc).

We strive to show the world how like them we are, though God calls us to be a peculiar people; and though we may well be filled with enthusiasm and

good intent, we must learn well the lesson that well-meaning disobedience may be just as damaging as malicious intent and all out rebellion.

Close:

As we close out this chapter, we see how the Lord touches the untouchable.

How He heals not just a disease, but also a life of loneliness and rejection.

We see how He brings the outcast in, and He is still doing that today.

His grace still touches the hearts and lives of those who have found sin, like leprosy, to be a tough taskmaster. His arm is still outstretched to those who are in need of His mercy and forgiveness.

Maybe that is you, today.

Maybe you need to do as this poor man did and come humbly before the Lord, asking for His salvation, worshipping at His feet, and believing upon Him.

There is also a vital lesson there is for the Christian. That is how we need to be wise in our witness, to know when words are called for, and when silence may be the better part.

To realize that sometimes our salvation needs to be seen, before it is heard, and that even well-meant intentions, when carelessly applied, may do more harm than good.

May God give us wisdom in this.