

Luke

Healing a Leper
Luke 5:12-15

With Study Questions

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Luke 5:12-115

And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on *his* face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." ¹³ Then He put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴ And He charged him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded."

¹⁵ However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities ¹⁶ So He Himself *often* withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:12-16).

Introduction

I wasn't raised in what can be called a Christian home. Like many people, we really didn't practice any type of religion beyond the vapors of the Judeo/Christian culture in which we lived. As time goes on those vapors have become a very thin mist. The basic ethics of Christianity are becoming less and less known and practiced, and the messages found in biblical parlance have hit the exits.

It was once commonly understood if someone mentioned 'crossing the Jordan' or 'the writing is on the wall' or a 'scapegoat'. We might continue to have some understanding of these terms but to reference where they originated and how were they initially used in Scripture is often met by blank stares.

Such is the case in the passage before us. I don't know that I have ever met a leper and the notion of being involved in a religious "cleansing" seems odd at best. Yet, if we have read the Old Testament, these are major players. If we're consigned to viewing a passage like this through mere 21st century western eyes, we might be left scratching our heads from an "**itch**" that can't be healed (Deuteronomy 28:27 - pause for blank stares).

With all the illnesses by which Jesus was surrounded, why a leper? Why send the leper to a priest? Why tell the leper not to tell anyone? In case you haven't noticed, my approach and my prayer concerning sermons generally revolve around question 3 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It asks and answers:

Q. 3. *What do the Scriptures principally teach?*

A. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

What do we learn of God in this encounter? What call do we find God having in our lives as we read these words? And since Jesus taught that the Scriptures were primarily about Him (John 5:39; Luke 4:21), what is found of Christ as He interacts with this man "**full of leprosy**"?

It is my wonderful task as a pastor to help us all answer these questions and respond accordingly. It is truly the way we should always read God's word. As James wrote,

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law of liberty*, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does (James 1:25 NASB).

"**Intently**" in this verse means "determined to do." Let us not read statically but dynamically, vigorously, as if someone is teaching how to operate very dangerous but extremely necessary equipment. Uzzah suffered because he handled that which was holy in an overly casual manner (2 Samuel 6:6-8).

And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on *his* face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." ¹³ Then He put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him (Luke 5:12, 13).

An Unclean Outcast

One is hard-pressed to find a condition in Scripture as dreadful as leprosy. Not merely because of the discomfort of the disease, but also because the disease ushered its carrier into a condition of contempt and isolation. The leper was banished, in exile and removed from those who would love and comfort him.

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.' ⁴⁶ 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 (Leviticus 13:45, 46).

Beyond that, because the leper was unclean, he could not even be touched by another (Leviticus 5:3). Not to get all psychological here, but especially after Covid and the non-legislated, yet magisterial pressure to isolate had innumerable side-effects. The AMA cited anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and many other psychological maladies. But it also included heart disease, increased strokes, diabetes, dementia and more. One can argue that the cure that was insisted upon was worse than the disease. But simply, and more biblically put, even in his unfallen state,

the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

Keep in mind, if they want to punish someone already in prison, they place them in isolation. Such was the case with this leper who somehow knew enough about Jesus to find Him and fall on his face before Him and **"implore"** or beg Him for what he desired.

Notice that the leper is both confident and deferential. **"Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."** He is confident that Christ can heal him (perhaps due to all the miracles he had seen) but he humbly offers the conditional conjunction, **"if"**. One might ask, 'why wouldn't Jesus be willing?' Let us recognize that most people, even during the time of Christ

were not healed. Most people in the course of history are not healed. And when it gets right down to it, since we all will come to the end of our journey, it is God's will for us to be with Him.

Of course, Jesus was willing. Then He did something that, as we have already learned, appears to be at odds with the law of God (Leviticus 5:3). He touched the leper. It is here that we need to grasp the unique and incorruptible office of Jesus. Sometimes we read the Old Testament with all of its ordinances and ceremonial statutes, and it can be laborious. Keeping in mind that the ceremonies of the Old Testament all pointed to Christ, let us read a short piece.

The Lord said to Moses, ²³ "Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh 500 shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, 250, and 250 of aromatic cane, ²⁴ and 500 of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. ²⁵ And you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. ²⁶ With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, ²⁷ and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, ²⁸ and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils and the basin and its stand. ²⁹ You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy. Whatever touches them will become holy (Exodus 30:22-29).

Bottom line here, so far from Jesus being made unholy by the leper, the leper is made holy by Him. For what He touches is made holy. We have no distant Savior, but One who was made flesh and dwelt among us. One who was tempted in all things yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

In the Scriptures, illness is used metaphorically for sin. For example, by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). And there is one thing we are promised an affirmative response to when we, like this leper, approach Christ. We will see it later in this Gospel when a crucified and dying criminal makes his petition.

Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I

say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42, 43).

And He charged him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.”¹⁵ However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities¹⁶ So He Himself *often* withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:14-16).

The Testimony

The episode takes an unusual turn here. Although it would not have been unusual for the knowledgeable Israelite. The healing is not done in isolation. There is a message which attends it, similar to word and sacrament. The sacraments mean very little if we have no idea whatsoever what they point to.

Similar to believe and be baptized (Mark 16:16) or repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38) Jesus would have this healed man offer a “**testimony.**” What is the nature of this testimony? First it is to the priest, which would further render them inexcusable in their rejection of Christ. But more profoundly is the testimony itself found in Leviticus 14.

The testimony/offering consisted of two clean, living birds. One was killed and the other dipped in the blood and released into an open field. Similar to the scapegoat (Leviticus 16), we have an offering/sacrifice where one is dead and the other alive. The unity of Scripture is beyond marvelous! Written 1500 years before the birth of Christ we see the message of a redeemer that has died and yet is somehow alive.

Little wonder that Christ would have this take priority. In the offering of the leper, the Gospel resides in seminal form. All the elements of worship should, at one level or another, contain this similar message. This leper, who had been isolated and shunned from the people of God is now to be welcomed back as one who, by the grace of God, is clean.

We see a similar, yet difficult, blessing in the very neglected practice of church discipline. There is the painful process of confronting the sinner who refuses the repent. But there can be also the very uncomfortable process of welcoming the sinner back lest he “**be overwhelmed by**

excessive sorrow” (2 Corinthians 2:7). Church can feel very uncomfortable when sinners arrive. But I would prefer to pastor a church of sinners than a church of people who don’t want to be around them.

Jesus had told the leper to **“tell no one.”** The best thing this leper could have done as an example of gratitude would be to simply obey Jesus. But clearly, he did not. **“The report went around concerning Him all the more.”** And if we read Mark’s account of the event we learn that it was the healed leper who **“went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, and could no longer enter a town” (Mark 1:45).**

But the inability of Jesus to enter a town was not a cause or excuse for lethargy. As William Hendriksen observes,

So, again and again, Jesus would withdraw himself and steal away to lonely places. This withdrawal also had a positive purpose, namely, to pour out his heart in prayer in order that the reservoirs of his body and soul might be replenished from his Father’s inexhaustible resources.¹

¹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Vol. 11, p. 291). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Questions for Study

1. Why are passages like the one before us difficult to understand (pages 2, 3)?
2. With what mindset should we read the Bible (page 3)?
3. Describe the conditions that a leper would find himself? Why do you suppose this is important to grasp (pages 4, 5)?
4. Why was it okay for Jesus to touch a leper (page 5)?
5. What will Jesus always say 'yes' to (page 5)?
6. Why did Jesus have the leper go to the priest? What does that tell us today (pages 6, 7)?