

## Mark 1:40-45 “The Power and Compassion of Jesus”

Intro. Our story today is in the context of the Galilean ministry of Christ. Mt. 4:23 sums up for us the Galilean ministry by saying, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases among the people.” Needless to say, with such great preaching, and such great miracles being performed, the crowds following Jesus became very large.

Why did He perform these miracles? He did *not* do so to be sensational (v.44a). Rather, He performed miracles for the following reasons: First, Jesus performed miracles to prove that He is the promised Messiah and even the Son of God (1:1; Jn. 20:30-31). For example, when He healed this leper, He wanted him to go to the priests in Jerusalem, as v.44 says, for a testimony unto them concerning Him. So God does not expect us to have blind faith. He gives solid basis for our faith, including eye-witness testimony of the miracles of Jesus. Secondly, Jesus performed miracles because He cared for people and wanted to help people who were suffering. He healed the leper, as v.41 says, because He was moved with compassion. Thirdly, Jesus performed miracles to give physical illustrations of spiritual truths. For example, when Jesus healed the blind man, He taught us that He is the light of the world. When He multiplied the loaves, He taught that He is the bread of life. When He calmed the storm, He was showing that He can bring peace to the troubled heart. So as we shall see, this leper and his cleansing illustrate to us some spiritual truths about ourselves and the Lord.

So this morning I want to bring out some of these truths and let’s trust the Lord to help us apply them to our lives. First of all, let’s consider from our story the fact that:

### I. WE FACE PROBLEMS IN LIFE

Notice in v.40 that “a leper came to Him.” In our country we are not exposed to leprosy very much. Today the disease is known as Hansen’s disease.<sup>1</sup> This is apparently the first leper that Jesus cleansed. He healed the sick before this time (v.34), but we are not told that He healed any lepers.

Now this man was facing a serious problem in three areas of his life. He illustrates the kinds of problems we face. First of all:

A. We Have Physical Problems – This man had a major problem. The affliction he had is called leprosy because it makes the skin scaly. In fact, the Greek word translated leper (*lepros*) is based on the word *lepis*, which means “scale.” What was referred to as leprosy would have several symptoms. In its early stages it is hardly noticeable. Then discolored spots or patches appear on the skin. As the disease progresses, the skin becomes thick and scaly. On the face especially the skin begins to bunch, with deep furrows between the swellings, so that the face of a leper begins to look somewhat like a lion. Numbness follows as nerve endings die. As a result, fingers and toes often became damaged, and even eventually they would rot off bit by bit. Later, sores and ulcers develop

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<sup>1</sup> Though in the Bible “leprosy” could refer to several skin diseases (Garland, p.74).

due to poor blood supply. The throat will also be affected with the leper's voice becoming hoarse. One can even smell leprosy, for the leper emits a very unpleasant odor. According to Luke's account (5:12) this man was "full of leprosy." So he probably was in the advanced stages of leprosy. Obviously, leprosy was an incurable<sup>2</sup> dreaded disease. So the condition of this man was very serious.

Now if you are facing a physical sickness today, perhaps you can identify with this man. For many years I had a problem with eczema. Currently, my wife is facing an inflammatory illness that could be very serious. She has spent over 60 days in the hospital just this year. Many will face cancer or heart disease. Sickness and other problems are a part of life, especially as we get older.

He not only had a physical problem, but he illustrates that fact that:

B. We Have Social Problems - The leper was a social outcast. This was required by Old Testament law. One reason for this was due to the fact that leprosy can be contagious. It can be transmitted through the air or through contact with something the leper has touched. And that it is contagious to a degree partially explains why Lev. 13:45, 46 commands isolation for the leper, "Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp" (See also Num. 5:2-4).<sup>3</sup> Isolation also prevented others from becoming religiously defiled. The leper had not only to bear the physical pain of his disease; he also had to bear the anguish and the heart-break of being banished from family and human society and shunned literally like the plague. The only friends they could have would be other lepers. How would you like to be a social outcast like this leper?

Some can identify with this man, though to a lesser degree. If you are quiet and shy, or if there is something different about you, you may have to deal with being socially shunned by others. Those that struggle with mental illness often face social isolation.

Finally, this man illustrates the fact that:

C. We Have Spiritual Problems – That was illustrated in this man in 2 respects. First of all, he was religiously unclean according to Old Testament law. This is reflected in his request in that last of v.40, that Jesus would make him "clean." He didn't just ask to be healed. You see, many things caused an Israelite to be unclean, such as touching a dead body. That meant that he could not participate in temple worship or many other activities. But whereas most conditions of uncleanness were only temporary, leprosy was usually a lifetime condition.

The second spiritual problem this man had was the fact that he was made to feel that his leprosy was due to his sin, or perhaps the sins of his parents (Jn. 9:2). The Jewish Rabbis loved to trace disease to moral causes. They would say, "The sick is not healed, till all his sins are forgiven him."<sup>4</sup> Thus, leprosy was described as a chastisement from God. In the case of Moses' sister Miriam, her leprosy *was* a chastisement from God. However, Jesus did not agree with the Rabbis that sickness was typically a direct result of personal sin (John 9:3; Luke 13:1-5). It is primarily a consequence of Adam's original sin.

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<sup>2</sup> Even today leprosy is incurable; even though a drug called Dapsone can control it.

<sup>3</sup> It is also why Lev. 13 instructed a person who had the severe kind of leprosy to burn his garments (v.52).

<sup>4</sup> That is one reason why Jesus said to the paralytic in 2:5, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

Leprosy illustrates the spiritual problem that we face. Like leprosy, sin is a deep-seated disease, infecting every part of our human nature, heart, will, conscience, understanding, and affections (Jer. 17:9). Like leprosy:

1. Sin Has Symptoms - Jesus taught that sin is a matter of the heart, which shows itself in the way you talk and the way you act. We are all born with a sin nature. And that spiritual disease *always* manifests itself in our lives. Every child will tell a lie. We all will break at least some of the 10 Commandments, especially inwardly. Furthermore, like leprosy:

2. Sin Separates – The leper was separated from God’s temple. Even so, sin separates from God. Isaiah 59:2 says, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” Likewise, sin and selfishness tends to separate friends and family members. Finally, like leprosy:

3. Sin Leads to Death - Like leprosy, the sin problem is incurable by any earthly physician or priest, and will surely lead to death. Rom. 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death....” Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, and spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God, even while physically alive. The leprous soul is eternally excluded from heaven and the fellowship of saints, and eternally hid from the face of God. Leprosy was considered a living death and it would surely lead to an untimely death. Even so, the soul that is dead in sin will surely die physically as well. It’s just a matter of time.

Have you done anything about the sin problem you were born with? Are your sins forgiven? Blessed indeed are those who have learned that they are spiritual lepers. To know our disease is the first step towards a cure. So I want to move from the problem to the fact that:

## II. WE MUST BRING OUR PROBLEMS TO JESUS

Because leprosy was incurable, this man believed that Jesus was his only hope. So he came to Jesus (v.40a). Luke tells us that this actually occurred while Jesus was in one of the cities of Galilee. Why was the leper in a city when he was to remain outside the city? He could have simply disobeyed the Law at this point, for he came in desperation. I can imagine that much of that crowd left in a hurry when he came, and perhaps only watched from a distance. The only ones who may have stayed with Jesus were the disciples.

Now I want you to see how this man was cleansed from his leprosy. Here we see an illustration of what it takes for a person to be cleansed from their sin.

A. Come to Jesus in Faith - The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8 and elsewhere that we are saved by faith. Even so, this man was saved from leprosy by faith. Notice how he expressed his faith in Jesus in the last of v.40. He said to Jesus, “You can make me clean.” Or literally, he was saying that Christ had the power (*dunamai*) to make him clean, to cure him of leprosy. Now notice 3 truths illustrated by this man’s faith. First, consider with me:

1. Faith Comes by Hearing – That’s what Roman 10:17 says. How did this man come to believe that Jesus could heal him? Since he was banished from the people, he must have come to believe in Jesus simply by hearing reports about Jesus healing people, as stated in v.34. He felt that since Jesus had healed many others, He could heal him!

Even so, none of us have seen Jesus. All we have to go on are eye-witness accounts of the miracles of Jesus, His teaching, His love for us as manifested at the cross, and His resurrection (Rom. 10:9). Furthermore:

2. A Great Problems Requires Great Faith – This was no small faith that he expressed with the words, “... you are able to cleanse me.” The Rabbis confessed that they were powerless in the presence of this living death, for leprosy was incurable. They considered the healing of a leper as difficult as raising the dead. Though Lev. 14 suggests that a cure was to be expected, at least in some cases, this cure was only to be found in the direct agency of God. The Old Testament mentions the healings of Moses’ hand, Miriam, and Naaman, but all the healings were by miracle. This is why Jesus included His ability to cleanse the lepers as one of the signs of His Messiahship when the disciples of John came to Him (Lk. 7:22). So this leper was expressing great faith indeed.

Even so, it takes great faith to believe that you can be cleansed of sin. If you have ever tried to win total victory over sin, you know how thoroughly we are affected by sin. You can’t get rid of sin through education. You can’t get rid of sin by medication. You can’t get rid of sin by man’s religion. Yet you and I are called upon to believe that Jesus can forgive us, and set us free from the power of sin. That takes great faith.

How do you have such great faith? The answer is this:

3. This Requires a Great Object of Faith – Only a great Savior can cause great faith to develop in the soul of man. Do you see the real basis of this man’s faith? He is saying, “You are able to do something that only *God* can do, as stated in 2 Kings 5:7<sup>5</sup>. That being the case, this man must have understood that Jesus was the Son of God. In fact, notice the way this leper approaches Christ. Mark says in v.40 that he knelt down before Jesus. Matthew tells us that he “worshiped” Christ and addressed Him as “Lord” (see Mt. 8:2). His manner of approach and speaking clearly indicates that He believed that Jesus was more than just a man. He must at the very least be God’s anointed Messiah, the King who was promised! It seems he even believed that Jesus was the Son of God!

When you need forgiveness and victory over sin, or when you have some other great problem, don’t look to man. Don’t look to the government. Look to none other than the Son of God!

B. Believe That Jesus Wants to Help Us – The leper believed that Jesus had the power to heal. The only condition that had to be met was expressed by him in the last of v.40, “If You are willing.” He didn’t demand anything. He recognized the sovereignty of King Jesus and would only ask that His will be done. He didn’t talk about *his* desires, saying “I’d like to be healed.” That’s a far cry from what you hear today when people are told to demand healing from God by “claiming it.”

Many of us, at least intellectually, believe that Jesus has the power to do anything. That being the case, our prayer should only be conditioned by, “If You will,” not “if You are able.” It is best though to know what God’s will is *before* you pray and then ask with confidence that He has both the power and will to do what we ask. After all, 1 John 5:14-15 says, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” (Cf. also 2 Cor. 12:7-9).

I want to apply this to a different problem that we face. Indeed, sin is our greatest problem. And you don’t have to be concerned about whether or not God wants to save you from your sins, for God has made it abundantly clear in 2 Pet. 3:9 and 1 Tim. 2:4 that He is not willing that sinners

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<sup>5</sup> “when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, ‘[Am] I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy?...’”

perish and that He is willing that all men be saved. So when you pray and ask God to save you, believe that He wants to, and ask in faith.

### III. CHRIST WILL RESPOND TO FAITH

More important than the faith of the leper is the attitude of Jesus toward the leper. He does not flee from this leper as others would have. Jesus did not look down on him for being a leper. The unkind and harsh judgment of those who ascribed individual physical afflictions to personal sin was condemned by Him in no uncertain terms (Lk. 13:1-5; Jn. 9:1-7).

Now when you come to Jesus with your need, I believe His response will be as we read here:

A. He Will Have Compassion Upon You – In v.41 Luke reports, “Then Jesus, moved with compassion....” This literally speaks of compassion so strong that a person’s entrails move (*splagchnizomai*). Jesus saw the clear evidence of his suffering and his desperation and had compassion on him. One stands amazed at the number of times this compassion of Jesus is mentioned in the Gospels (Hendriksen lists 24 references). The religious leaders were so cold and legalistic that they overlooked the weightier matters of the law such as mercy (Mt. 23:23).

Just remember this, ★our misery makes us the objects of His mercy. He cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7). His love is greater than our sin, and as the Scripture says, “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20). Take heart, dear Christian, from this truth. Don’t you believe that Jesus loves you, and cares for you? You need to know the true nature of God to be powerful in prayer, and strong in faith. So come to Jesus in prayer and He will have compassion on you.

Jesus not only responded with compassion, but also:

B. He Will Touch You in Some Way – In the middle of v.41 we read that Jesus “stretched out His hand and touched him.” At that point it is likely that the whole crowd, standing at a distance, gasped when He did that. You see, men shunned lepers and we are safe to assume that this man had not been touched in years except perhaps by other lepers. Even his family brought out his food and drink and left without having any contact with him. All he could do was wave to them. He could never hold them in his arms or be touched by them. But Jesus reached out and touched him. When Jesus healed someone, He typically touched them in the process. No doubt this was the first loving touch this leper had felt in a long time. His touch was probably what the leper needed more than anything else. With His touch Jesus let this man know that He loved and cared for him, and was indeed willing to heal him. Also, in connection with such physical contact, healing power issued from the Savior and was transmitted to the person in need of it.

Jesus Christ is still touching lives today. However, He has no hands but our hands. God’s people are to reach out and touch people’s lives with compassion. There is healing power in a loving touch, such as a hug.<sup>6</sup> During Covid many people quit touching each other. We became more and more socially isolated. If Jesus was willing to touch the *leper*, then healthy people in particular should be willing to take someone by the hand and pray with them.

Furthermore, I have good news for you:

C. He Assures You of His Willingness to Help – In the last of v.41 Jesus said to the leper, “I am willing.” Often times it is God’s will to heal you and to restore you. Jesus said in Jn. 10:10 that

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<sup>6</sup> <https://evergreenpsychotherapycenter.com/the-healing-power-of-touch>

He had come to give us life, yes, abundant life. Have faith in God! However, I do not agree that it is *always* God's will to heal. This is obviously the case, for Heb. 9:27 says, "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." The Bible is full of promises from God and when you find one that properly applies to you, then you know that God is certainly willing to fulfill that promise in your life.

Finally, we see in this text that:

D. He Has the Power to Help – In the last of v.41 Jesus said, "Be cleansed." That is a command (imperative) that only God could fulfill. Then Mark reports in v.42 that, "As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed." That very instant the deadly plague left the poor sufferer, and he was healed. I can imagine those shriveled-up claws instantly becoming beautiful hands along with the restoration of his face, and the rest of his body. Even though leprosy had eaten away the leper's eyebrows and eyelashes, left his skin scaly and bloody, destroyed his nose and throat, and caused his fingers and toes to be worn off, Jesus was able to restore him *instantly* to his former health. The healings brought about by Jesus were complete and instantaneous. What healing power Jesus possesses! It is a cheering and comforting thought that with Christ nothing is impossible.

The suddenness of this cure and its completeness is an illustration of what can happen in the salvation of the sinner. Immediately, all your sins can be forgiven. You can be born again in an instant. He can take many sinful practices out of your life immediately if you have truly repented. I have heard the testimonies of drug addicts and alcoholics who were immediately set free from those addictions.

How should he have responded to such a miracle? How should we respond to God's work in our lives? Well let's see last of all:

#### IV. WE SHOULD RESPOND WITH OBEDIENCE

What is the first evidence that Christ has entered your life? Obedience. Christ was very insistent on this man's obedience. In vv.43-44. "And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone'...." "Strictly warned" (*embrimaomai*) is from a word that literally means "to snort," like an angry bull. In the Bible it means, "To charge with earnest admonition, to charge sternly." Children, it's kind of like the tone your parents will have when they really insist that you do something, or not do something. So if Christ has saved you, if He has healed you, if He has blessed you in some way, then you of all people should obey Him. Now notice with me:

##### A. How the Leper Was To Obey Christ

1. He Was to Keep Quiet – In v.44 Jesus said, "See that you say nothing to anyone...." Why was this man commanded to keep silent about what happened to him, at least until he had shown himself to the priest? The main reason is found in the last part of the verse. If the healed man had spread all around the story of his healing first, then the priests, who were hostile by this time to Christ, might refuse to certify his healing. Furthermore, v.45 tells of the problem that Jesus was seeking to avoid. The more the healed leper talked, the more Jesus would be hindered by

massive crowds, for this was truly one of His greatest miracles to date. (See also 3:9; 6:32-33; 7:24).<sup>7</sup>

2. He Was to Be a Testimony to the Priest – Jesus says in the last of v.44, “but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” When the priest examined him and certified that he had been cleansed, they would have evidence of the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, for such healing was rare and unusual. So as the end of this verse states, Christ wanted to use this miracle as a testimony unto them and to all about His Messiahship and His regard for the Law. How could they certify that the man had been healed from leprosy and not recognize the divine power of the person who healed him? Also, without the formal testimony of the priests, the people would not receive the leper as officially clean. He would have to remain in social isolation.

The cleansed leper also was to “offer...those things which Moses commanded.” Lev. 14:4-8 says that he is to offer two birds, provided by the priest. The two birds were symbols of the person to be cleansed. The first bird, bearing the uncleanness of the leper, is slain, its blood dropping into the clear, living water over which it is slain. Blood had to be shed in order for the man to be cleansed from his uncleanness. The living bird is spared death by being dipped in the blood and water. With the blood of the substitute and the water of cleansing having been applied, the bird is set free, released from death and at liberty to return to the fellowship of other birds.<sup>8</sup>

B. Like the Leper, Too Many Disobey Christ – In v.45 we read, “However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.” In v.40 we saw the leper at his best. Now, in v.45, we see him at his worst. He probably meant well. He became so excited that he failed to obey. But because of this act of inexcusable disobedience, he deprived many towns of the blessings that might have come their way if Jesus could have freely entered (cf. v.38 & 45b). He probably had good intentions, but he was still wrong. Obey Christ. He truly knows what is best.

### C. What We Are To Do

1. Don't Be Quiet about Jesus! - Today, when we are cleansed of our sin by Christ, we are *not* commanded to keep silent. We are commanded to tell others about the wonderful things that God had done for us. It is interesting that Jesus told this man to keep quiet, and yet he told everybody. Jesus commands us to tell everybody - and we keep quiet! We are to obey Jesus. He commanded us to be witnesses unto Him (Acts 1:8). He commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

2. Submit to the Symbol of Baptism - As the birds symbolized what had happened to the leper, so baptism symbolizes what Christ did for us, and what we have experienced. If you have allowed Christ to cleanse you of your sin, you should go through baptism as a testimony unto others.

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<sup>7</sup> Garland adds that Jesus did not seek to be sensational and appear to be working up a crowd to lead to insurrection (pp.76-77).

<sup>8</sup> The blood of the bird was applied to the man's right ear (God's Word), right thumb (God's work), and right great toe (God's walk). Also, this is also a wonderful picture of Christ. The two birds represent two different aspects of our Lord's ministry: His death and His resurrection. He died to save us from the leprosy of sin. Though one bird could not picture both death and freedom and life, Christ in His death and resurrection shows both in one. “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.” When we allow Christ, the great High Priest, to apply His blood and cleansing to our lives, we are raised with Him to walk in newness of life; we are free from our living death. We are set free from eternal death.

Conclusion: I believe there are probably some in my audience today who have never truly come to Christ to have your sins forgiven. You are still carrying around with you that spiritual leprosy called sin. Why not let Christ cleanse you today? Jesus is saying, “Why will you die when I am here ready to cure you?” So come to Jesus. Put your faith in Him. He died for you, and He can cleanse you from all your sin. Call upon His name, and ask Him to save you. Then, once He saves you, you are to obey Him by confessing your faith in Christ and following Him in baptism.

Many of you are already saved. Do you have a problem you need to bring to Jesus? Put your faith in Him. Ask Him to help you today. Be sure you are living in obedience to Him. Does He want you to be baptized or join this church? If so, obey Him today as we extend the invitation.

Sources: David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Matthew Henry (on *Online Bible*); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Power of Jesus: Study Notes on Matthew 8:1-9:8, 18-35* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).