

Complete Restoration for All Unclean, Part 1

Luke 5:14-16

September 25, 2016

There's such kindness and compassion and tenderness that this man, Jesus Christ, has toward the least of these. And I include myself as one of those. We're going to get, today, yet another striking picture of that compassion as we see, once again how his mercy is directed by divine purpose and by concern, loving concern.

If you were here with us last week, you'll know we entered in Luke 5. Amazing story of how Jesus called his first four disciples, how he enlisted them into true discipleship, which he intended as a fulltime deal. Like, Leave everything. Come on with me. We're going to travel around. And that's exactly what they did. They caught a glimpse of his holy nature, his character, his divine power, his authority, all that in the miraculous catch of fish, and they left everything and followed him. They didn't even sell the fish. They just came back, left everything, and followed Jesus. And now, as we move forward in the narrative, Jesus is on the move again. And he's going from city to city in Galilee. He is preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

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Those disciples are with him, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee. And they're learning from him day after day, watching him work, listening to him preach and teach and explain. They're watching his compassion and mercy as he heals people, and he ministers to their needs. On one of those days in one of those cities, something surprising happened to Jesus and his disciples.

Look at verse 12 there in Luke 5. "While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face, and begged him, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one, but 'go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.' But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

Now, if you know even a little about the Old Testament, you know that lepers, leprosy, lepers are an unclean thing. Leprosy is an unclean thing and lepers, themselves, are to be kept at a distance. And that's because leprosy is a vivid picture of the defiling, all-encompassing

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nature of sin. We have a theological term for that. It's called, Total Depravity. The theological concept of Total Depravity is essentially this: that the corruption of our sin-nature is so thorough, so complete, we are completely saturated with the principle of sin. We're born into sin. We're born guilty, even of the original sin of Adam. And we're sinners by nature, sinners by nurture, and then sinners by decision. We commit sin. We prove we're sinners by the sin that we commit. There are many, many places in Scripture we can go to illustrate this concept of Total Depravity. I'll just tell you a few. Genesis 6, Psalm 10, Psalm 32, Psalm 50, Psalm 51, Romans 3, Galatians 5, Ephesians 2, Titus 3. Many, many other places. If you didn't get all those down, just read your Bibles. You'll see it everywhere, this sin principle and this concept of Total Depravity.

But let me just read one of those texts you. You're familiar with it actually. It's Romans chapter 3 and at the end of verse, or halfway through verse 10, it says this, "None is righteous, not even one." Paul, you understand, in this section in Romans chapter 3, he's compiling a number of Scriptures from the Old Testament that prove his point that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He says, "No one is righteous, not even one." That's pretty all-encompassing, right? That's you and me, right? "No one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." Boy, we do not like to

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hear that about ourselves, do we? We like to think of ourselves as pretty good people. What do you mean I've become worthless? Of no worth? My entire world, my entire upbringing in school has told me, you have value. You are important. You are the honor of the student of the month. Stick this on your mother's bumper, so that everybody could see how great you are. Everybody gets a trophy, right, in sports, even the losers get a trophy, participation trophy. What is that about?

"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." And then sums it all up in this statement, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." That is the picture of humanity. And if you don't see it all on the surface all the time, give thanks to God for that. But God knows all of our hearts deeply, thoroughly. As Josh mentioned, he's omniscient. He sees absolutely everything, every motive, every thought, every temptation that we give way to in just the smallest minutest fraction of a second, he sees everything. And you know what, he doesn't like the picture that he sees.

Now Total Depravity is a doctrine that does not imply that we're going to see and experience all of humanity at its very worst all the time.

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But what it does say as the doctrine, what the Bible teaches is that we all have the potential to be as wicked as the demons of hell itself. Any restraint in the full expression of that kind of depravity that we see in this world, folks, that's due to common grace. It's due to the fact that God is gracious. He has put restraints in place.

There are social restraints like family upbringing. There are social restraints like government, law enforcement, military, that we thank God for because they won't "bear the sword in vain," right? There also internal restraints like Romans 2 says. There's the law of God inscribed in the heart, on every single human heart and there is a conscience that bears witness to violations of that law. And even our own hearts, Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Listen, never tell a kid, follow you heart. Don't tell him that. That's really, really bad advice because that's exactly what we're seeing around us everywhere in our culture, right? An entire culture that has been trained to follow all the deceptive impulses of their sin-sick hearts.

Now, you and I, we're not able to observe the desperateness and the depth of the condition of the human heart, as I said, that is a grace of God. But we need to understand that there is one who sees all the depth and all the ugliness of our sinful hearts, and it's God. And he

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sees it all the time. It says in Psalm 7:11, "God is a righteous judge, and God feels indignation every day." He feels that indignation as an orientation of his holy nature to the sinfulness of men, which he sees all the time as he looks down upon mankind. We don't see it as clearly because of our creaturely limitations. We're not omniscient. We only see on the surface, right? "The Lord sees not as man sees," 1 Samuel 16:7. "For Man looks on the outward appearance." That's just a fact. It's not a judgment; it's a fact. "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

And listen, that is why this object lesson of leprosy is so useful because it teaches us to see sin as God sees sin. We do indeed look at the outward appearance. We're only able to judge a book by its cover. And so to help us understand the comprehensively defiling nature of sin, God pointed us to look at this disease of leprosy. The portrayal of sin and its uncleanness, the outward portrayal of sin's defilement, it's so thorough and at times, it can be outright disgusting to look at. And our natural reaction is to withdraw, to pull away, to stay away, never to touch it.

Someone who like this man in our story, comes near to us and he's, as Luke described, full of leprosy, we are not about to rush up and give this guy a big, huge hug, to kiss him on his leprous cheeks. We don't

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want to get any on us. Perhaps there are some out there who, just out of compassion, a deep, deep compassion like a, you know, all those nurses and medical healthcare workers among us who have great compassion, they want to do that, but even they have to overcome a natural revulsion that they feel at the sight, and at times even the smell, of leprosy. We all feel like keeping a distance.

Listen, that is to show us, beloved, that none of us on our own is attractive to God because we are so thoroughly and comprehensively defiled by our sin. This leprosy is a vivid external portrayal of that internal corruption and defilement of the sin nature, of the guilt of sin. And get this, that is what makes the touch of Jesus so astounding, so remarkable. He reached out and touched this leper who was more defiled on the inside than he was on the outside. We might imagine the revulsion that Jesus had to overcome, and yet, there is no hint here at all, none whatsoever, that Jesus was repulsed. That is a picture of such great mercy toward us sinners, is it not?

Folks, that's the lesson we need to see in this story. That's the main point, that God sent Jesus to demonstrate his great mercy toward us sinners. We need to see ourselves as the leper, not as the crowd watching the scene and saying, oh how interesting. Whoa, he touched

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the... No! We need to see ourselves as that guy. As sinners, we're not even benign in our sin and defilement.

It's not like it just, whoops, happened to us, we fell into it. We're active sinners. We, we pursue this. It makes us incredibly abhorrent to a holy God. If you could imagine it, it's like all of us are lepers and we are not just shamed by leprosy, in fact, we love our leprosy. We rejoice in our oozing sores, and in our rotting skin, and in the putrid stench of our leprous defilement. And not only that, but we want to spread the contagion. We want to infect everyone else around us with the same disease. We justify our defilement to each other, to God. We revel in it. We defend it as if it's understandable, excusable, okay. We even promote it. In our culture, I'll go a step further, we even celebrate it.

Beloved, that's how God sees us. On our own, that's how he sees us. And that's what makes his grace so amazing. That's what makes his mercy so astounding, so remarkable. As Paul wrote in Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners," lepers, ugly, "Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were," not just sinners, not just ugly, not just repulsive, "if while we were enemies." We were leprous rebels

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firing shots into the heavens at God. And if we were like that and, "We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." Beloved, this is our God loving us like this. And like this poor leper who came to Jesus, you and I, beloved, we can also find complete and total restoration for all our uncleanness. That's what this text is about.

And I guess we could end this service now since you already understand this main point in the story, but I've got all these points. I've got these notes here and I prepared an outline, so if you'll indulge me, look at point number one. Point number one: Come to Jesus to be completely cleansed. Come to Jesus to be completely cleansed. And here's where we need to get a picture of this defilement called leprosy. Look at Luke 5:12. Let's get some perspective. "While he [Jesus] was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy."

We'll stop there. Jesus is not in Capernaum anymore. As we said, he's moved on. His first four disciples are with him. He's in one of the cities of Galilee. We don't know which one. It's not germane to the point Luke wants us to see, but what Luke wants us to see, what his medical background, remember he was a physician, his medical background points out is this man was full of leprosy. If anybody knew what that description was, as he investigated all this for himself, he

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(Luke) knew the fullness of this man's leprosy. He is covered completely, totally full of leprosy.

And the question that comes up right off the bat as we face an interpretive issue is what is this guy doing in the city? Isn't he supposed to be outside the camp, outside the gates of the city, away from the population? You may remember in some of your Bible reading, Leviticus 13:45 and 46. You're going to want to actually find Leviticus and stick a finger in Leviticus 13 because we're going to go back there. But in Leviticus 13:45 and 46, the law pushes lepers, those who've been pronounced unclean because of leprosy, it pushes them outside of the community. It says there, "The leperos person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose." I wonder if the hippies read that in the 1970s, you know. Like, if they ever knew what they were saying with their attire.

Nonetheless, but they were supposed to, in that day, make their appearance obviously contemptible. They were to dress in such a way and, and not even do, you know, if they had make-up, no make-up, hair all unkempt. They were supposed to be in such a manner that people would know at first sight that they should steer clear. There is something wrong here. So, "The leperos person [...] shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover

his upper lip." So he's walking through society, he's covering his upper lip, that's probably to prevent the spread of an airborne contagion. And he was supposed to "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." Aah, that's rough.

Life as a leper was no picnic. It was lonely. It was isolated. These kinds of diseases classified as leprosy were pretty gross at times, also socially embarrassing, shameful. Worse still, it was your duty if you were afflicted with leprosy, it was your duty, you were responsible for calling everybody's attention to yourself at the time you did not want anybody looking at you. Can you imagine, some of you ladies, waking up in the morning, hair however it is when you wake up, no make-up, and you run out into public, run through the store, the mall at about, I don't know, what's the most populous time in the mall? Probably in the evenings, right? Early in the evening you wander the mall, and you look like, well, you just woke up. And not only are you like walking through the mall, but you're saying, hey, look at me. I'm unkempt. Now, guys, we don't feel the same thing, do we?

Most of the time these lepers lived in isolation. They lived in a leper colony, but when they came into town in the interest of the

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public good, you had to alert everyone to your presence. Torn clothing, unkempt appearance, crying out, unclean, unclean. So here's Jesus and his disciples, and they're walking through town and they're surrounded once again by this throng of people and suddenly they happen upon this leper. And the Greek text says it this way, "Behold, a man full of leprosy." Not even a verb there. It's just, just hitting us with the suddenness of it. One minute they're walking through town preaching and teaching, the next minute, Poof! There he is right in front of me. Sudden, unexpected. Now is this man violating the law of Moses by surprising the group in that way? If he had been crying out according to the Mosaic prescription we just read, he should have been crying out, "Unclean, unclean," to warn everybody of his presence as he approached.

Some people believe that's exactly what he was doing here. He was disobeying the law. That this man was so tired of his condition that he just took matters into his own hands. He wanted to approach stealthily to make sure that he had access to Jesus, to ensure that that he could at least make his request. And that's possible. It's possible to see it that way. There is certainly good reason, as we'll see later, this knowing this man's character, his dismissive attitude toward obedience. There's good reason to believe this leper was violating the law by being there. It's possible. Like coming to the group suddenly rather than announcing his presence, he had his own

interests in mind. He didn't want any, anybody preventing him from reaching his goal.

But we might have another reason here to go a little easier on this guy. If we can understand that Luke, Luke's description of his condition as full of leprosy is meant to tell us something. We might find a way to let him off the hook a bit as far as the law is concerned. So if you're there in your Bibles in Leviticus 13, look at the text there at Leviticus 13. We're going to get a, a bit of the understanding of this issue of leprosy and understand our text a little bit better by looking at this. There are actually two chapters that deal with leprosy. Both of them provide instruction about inspecting suspicious skin conditions, skin disorders, scalp conditions. There are even instructions in Leviticus 13 about contaminated clothing, even harmful molds that grow in the walls of house. I don't know if any of you have lived in a climate, we have lived in climates where there are things like black mold. Nasty stuff that can kill you if you don't detect these things and get rid of them.

So when the priests here, when they're not serving in the temple in Jerusalem on their assigned duty, they, they live throughout the land of Israel and they provided regular teaching from the law, but they

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also served in this capacity, sort of as public health inspectors. They weren't doctors, they were not healers; they were simply supposed to inspect the individual, make a pronouncement of clean or unclean and then prescribe action according to the law. In the case of a person who had been cleared of leprosy, then they inspected to make sure and then they pronounced the judgment of clean upon that person and they restored them back into free and unhindered social intercourse within the community. Now, Leviticus 13, I'm not going to read all 59 verses of chapter 13 or all 57 verses of chapter 14. You're welcome. But I do want to read enough to give you an idea of what's going on here, what's involved. This is a common part of everyday life living under the law of Moses.

Let's start in verse 1 of Leviticus 13. "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, 'When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a case of leprous diseases on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests, and the priest shall examine the disease, diseased area on the skin of his body. And if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a case of leprous disease. When the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him unclean. But if the spot is white in the skin of his body and appears to be no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall

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shut up the diseased person for seven days." Quarantine. "And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes," that is in his judgment, "the diseases is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall shut him up for another seven days. And the priest shall examine him again on the seventh day, and if the diseased area has faded and the disease had not spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only an eruption. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean. But if the eruption spreads in the skin, after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest. And the priest shall look, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, then the priest shall, announce, shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous disease.'" Let's stop there.

Twenty-one days, right, of examination, potentially. Let's call this case number one. A pers, a person comes in to see the priest, he's got all the, he's got the symptoms readily apparent, easily observable. He's got some kind of swelling or kind of a raising in his skin or something like that. The hair within it has turned white. It appears to be more than skin deep. The priest sees all of that and pronounce him unclean and shuts him up for a seven-day isolation period. The second period of examination comes, verses 5-8. If the affected area is fading and the disease hasn't spread, that's positive, but he's going to still isolate him for another seven-day period just to make

sure. And if it looks good after that 14-day isolation period, the priests will let him out of quarantine, pronounce him clean and prescribe the appropriate sacrifices. But if the disease has spread, the person's going to be pronounced unclean. All the laws of leprosy then take over. He's remanded to outside the camp and these laws of leprosy are going to radically change his life.

Look at verses 9-11. We'll call this case number two. When a man is afflicted with a leprous disease, he shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall look. And if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and there is raw flesh in the swelling, it is a chronic leprous disease in the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. He shall not shut him up, for he is unclean. That is, he is not going to put him into quarantine to see how this goes. He's going to say immediately, unclean. This case is a more severe case. It's a situation that doesn't require an isolation period. If he sees white swelling in the skin, if he sees raw flesh, he makes an immediate diagnosis, leprous disease, pronounces the person unclean. This is the case of an active infection, which is presumed, needs to be presumed, as highly contagious. And as long as the man is partially covered by his active skin disorder, the swelling, the raw flesh, this man remains unclean because the disease is still active.

But notice what happens when the man is covered by the skin disorder. Look at verse 12. "And if the leprous disease breaks out in the skin, so that the leprous disease covers all the skin of the diseased person from head to foot, so far as the priest can see, then the priest shall look, and if the leprous disease has covered all his body, he shall pronounce him clean of the disease; it has turned all white, and he is clean." Okay. What is that about? It sounds like he's been completely consumed by the disease. He's not clean of it. But we're talking about ritually clean or unclean. We're talking about ceremonially clean or unclean. We're talking about infectious or noninfectious. In that sense, if he's covered completely, that meant the infection had run its course. The contagious period is over, and the priest can pronounce him here clean and the man could return to the community. He may not look too good. He may not be too presentable. People may still want to stay away from him, but ceremonially, ritually, he's clean. He's not going to spread infection.

But again, "If raw flesh," verses 14-15, if raw flesh emerges again, he's going to become unclean again because the infection is no longer dormant, but now it's active. And then again, if the raw flesh became white again, the guys completely covered with white, deadened flesh, probably quite hideous, probably pretty disturbing in appearance, nevertheless, ceremonially speaking, the priest could pronounce him

clean, allow him to return to his life and work and social interaction because the community is safe.

So in Luke 5:12, Luke has described that leper as full of leprosy, right? And in my judgment, though the guy was clearly identifiable as a leper, he was so overcome by the infection that he had been pronounced clean by the priest. That's what allowed him to come upon Jesus, his disciples, the crowd in such a sudden way without announcing his arrival. Again, the man may have been hideous to look at, disturbing in his appearance, perhaps even somewhat disfigured, but he wasn't remanded to the perimeter of society, in the city, needing to live outside the camp. Leviticus 13 continues, another, it goes on for 59 verses this way describing various cases that fall under this larger category of leprosy. There are leprous boils described in verses 18-23. There are leprous burns described, verses 24-28, leprosy in the head area, like the hair and the eyes, verse 29-37, pretty comprehensive stuff. The whole chapter reads like a dermatology manual, covering the most severe form of leprosy, what we may know today as Hansen's disease, which is a long-term infection caused by a bacteria. It's contagious. Its spread by coughing and it's airborne, coughing, sneezing, and all that. It effects skin, mucus membranes, even the nerves.

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In fact, that's where Hansen's disease, if you see pictures from different countries, it could be most disabling because the loss of nerve sensation means any cut or fracture or burn can, because it's not felt, it can, it can, people don't know it's there and so it leads to severe infection and sometimes even death if it's not caught. You'll see amputees over there with stuff cut off. But Hansen's disease, one of the severest of skin disorders that we know of, it's only one among many skin disorders that could fall under this category.

The Hebrew word is, *saraat*. It's translated in the Greek as, *lepros*, which is where we get our English word, *leprosy*. Those words cover a whole host of skin disorders as we can see here. According to one commentator, the scribes counted as a many as 72 afflictions that were defined as *leprosy* that fell underneath this category. Everything thing from *eczema* to *psoriasis*, *favus* to *leukoderma*, *boils*, *burns*. Believe me, I have read more this week about nasty skin disorders, gross infections, scary contagions than I've cared to. I mean, it makes me itch just thinking about it. I'm wondering every time I look, what is that? Is that *leprosy*?

But imagine if you were living at that time. Many of us, today, have had skin conditions that could fall underneath these strictures in

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Leviticus 13. If you saw that on your body back then, what would you do? Would you cover it up? Would you hide it not wanting anybody to see? Not likely because you'd be considered a public health risk. And if it so overcame you and you happen to infect others, there could be worse consequences for you knowing you had a deadly contagious infection in your body and you didn't let anybody know. You'd be concerned about the public health. You'd be concerned about the outbreak in, of infection in the community. You would not want to be responsible for that. So you'd go to the priest. You'd show him the symptoms. You'd leave it to his judgment. You'd be directed by this chapter in the law of Moses, you'd accept his decision because, after all, he's only doing what God commanded.

People understood that God is the one who gave leprosy. And whether it was true or not, they tended to believe leprosy was an instance of divine punishment. Perhaps the leper himself or herself didn't commit a particular sin you could tie directly to this judgment of leprosy, but people wondered who sinned that this person has leprosy. Was it this person, his parents? Why is God angry and punishing?

You may remember in Numbers chapter 12 that God gave leprosy to Moses' sister Miriam. She had sinfully reproached Moses for marrying a Cushite woman, an Ethiopian and added to that was her arrogant

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presumption when she said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken," through, "only through Moses? Hasn't he spoken through us, as well?" Immediately, Numbers 12:2, the Lord heard it and she was judged by being covered with leprosy, becoming as white as snow.

God punished King Uzziah as well when he overstepped his responsibility as king and he tried to offer incense like a priest. Uzziah, you're not a priest. Be content with being a king. But he entered in, tried to offer incense, God struck him with leprosy, as well, suddenly, so suddenly that the priest rushed him in out of the temple. It says in 2 Chronicles 26:21, "King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper, he lived in a separate house, for he was exclude from the house of the Lord."

The people recognized leprosy is something God gave, and they generally viewed it as a punishment from God for some kind of sin. And since God gave the leprosy, well, only God could take it away. Only God could lift the punishment that he had inflicted. So the priests are not healers, they're public health inspectors. They're responsible to inspect, to examine, to identify. They're, they're responsible to pronounce for the good of the community this person clean or unclean. They're responsible to quarantine the infected. They're responsible to

send them out of society and then restore them back again into the community.

This important aspect of their role as priests, it not only protected the community from contagion, but it also instilled in God's people a vivid object lesson about the defiling nature of sin. We talked about that in the beginning. As a graphic portrayal of uncleanness, this prescribed response to instances of leprosy in the community, they were meant to instruct the people by obeying God's word in this matter of leprosy here. People learned that God desires total purity. God desires absolute holiness. He desires cleanliness among his people. Sin is defiling. And when it's pictured by a skin disorder, it's viewed in its proper light as disgusting, as shameful, it calls for separation and isolation. God wants his people completely clean.

Now turn back, if you will, to Luke chapter 5, and verse 12. And I'm inclined to give this guy the benefit of the doubt. There may be some among you who want to judge this guy. Go ahead, all right. Be unkind. But I think he had been pronounced ceremonially clean by the priests and he was not here in violation of the law. But he was still covered by this ugly skin disorder and this poor man longed for complete and total cleansing. Look what it says there, "When he saw Jesus, he fell

on his face and," he, "begged him, 'Lord if you will, you can make me clean.'" If you will, you are able to make me clean.

It's so interesting, isn't it, coming off the previous account where Simon Peter had first called Jesus, master, but then came to see him as, Lord. And we see this unknown leper come forward and immediately he addresses Jesus as Lord. He appropriately falls on his face in a posture of worship. He even prays to him. The text says, "begging him." That's the word that is used there.

And the leper has not only rightly identified Jesus as Lord, rightly bowed before Jesus, he has also rightly judged the fact Jesus possesses the power to make him clean. As we said, God is the one who gave the leprosy, which means God only could take it away. And this man, he may not have known the fullness of Jesus' identity, he may not have been aware of the incarnational reality of divinity in front of him robed in humanity, certainly didn't understand the hypostatic union, two natures, one person, how all that works together, but he knows enough. He had heard enough to know Jesus possessed the very power of God. His only question is, "Are you willing?"

That's the right question. It's a question we all ask in prayer, don't we? We pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." We pray, Lord, may

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this be so, but yet not as I will, but as you will. James tells us not to make presumptuous plans at all in our live, but instead to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. Anything other than that is arrogant boasting," James says. "And all such boasting is evil." This leper had it right, right? He bowed before him, he called him, Lord, he acknowledged his power and authority, and he identified the essential issue: Is it your will to cleanse me? Because I'd really like to be cleansed, but is it your will? He longed for cleansing, but he seems here ready to accept whatever the Lord decided.

I wonder if you and I in our prayers have the same attitudes. Are we willing to accept whatever the Lord's will is? We should be, because we as Christians know that even in pain, and affliction, and suffering the Lord's will is always best. I'd rather be in pain, and affliction, and suffering, and in the center of the Lord's will, than whole-bodied outside of it. That's a dangerous place to be.

The leper here also, he got to the heart of the matter because he wasn't just asking for healing, he was asking for cleansing. That's important. To be cleansed of leprosy was thorough and complete. It not only meant the removal of a superficial skin disorder, but it meant the shame associated with that as well was gone, along with the social stigma, gone as well. But even deeper than that, it meant the removal

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of some kind of divine disfavor. It's an expression of divine grace that he looked for. This man came seeking cleansing of disorders both superficial on the skin and deep in the heart. Cleansing the physical condition, it required the removal of divine punishment of God's disfavor. To be cleansed and restored to divines gra, divine grace, that's what he was after here.

That was verse 13, and, "Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him." Stop there. Before saying, "I will; be cleansed," jeshush, Jesus showed in him his willingness. He demonstrated it. What an incredible expression of compassion. No one in that society would have touched that leper, especially a rabbi out of fear he might contract uncleanness. But Jesus here is driven by compassion. In Mark's Gospel, he uses the verb, *splanchnizomai*. Jesus is moved with pity. That word may sound strange to our ears, but in their day, in their language, that was the deepest compassionate word you could find because it talked about a compassion that came from the bowels, from the guts, from the, *splanchna*, literally. And Jesus felt down in his gut a deep sympathy for this man, moved so much to extend his hand in compassion. We need to know that about our Lord, don't we?

Leon Morris suggests that Jesus may have had to stretch out his hand because the leper stayed at a distance from Jesus. He had to reach

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out. Morris wrote, "People shunned lepers and were safe in saying that nobody, but other lepers had touched this man in years." That touch spoke volumes. In that touch, as James Edwards put it, "Jesus removed the social, physical, and spiritual chasms prescribed by the Torah and custom alike."

"Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be cleansed.' And immediately the leprosy left him." Why wasn't Jesus made unclean here by making physical contact with the leper? As we said, the man had likely already been pronounced clean by a priest on the authority of the law of Moses. What kept people at a distance and made them reluctant to touch this guy was the unappealing thought of getting dead skin upon themselves. Okay? Further, they wanted to stay so far away from the potential of contamination. So even if this guy was officially pronounced clean, it was a ritual and ceremonial purity, not a social purity. By custom, by habit, just by revulsion, nobody wanted to touch this guy. The social stigma remained, but none of that concerned Jesus. Further, any uncleanness that may have been in this man, it was driven away by the touch of holiness.

As I said, Jesus saw deeper than we see. What was more unclean to him was not the leprosy that he could see, but the heart that he could see.

I like the way James Edwards put it again. He said, "A reverse contagion has taken place. Rather than Jesus being polluted by the leper, the leper is cleansed by Jesus' holiness." That right there, folks, is the cleansing power of holiness. It drives the contagion away. It drives the disease away; it drives the sin away. And at that moment, that man's questions are answered. Jesus not only possessed the power to cleanse him, he had the compassion to provide the healing, cleansing touch, as well. The leper came to Jesus to be completely cleansed. His request is granted by a loving, merciful Savior. What is this but encouragement for us all, to come to Jesus to be completely cleansed. As we said earlier, leprosy is a picture of sin's defilement, and of God's condemnation and judgment.

J.C. Ryle said this, "What are we all but lepers spiritually in God's sight. Sin is the deadly sickness by which we are all affected. It has eaten into our constitution. It has affected all of our faculties: Heart, conscience, mind, and will, are all diseased by sin. From the sole of our foot to the crown of our head, there is no soundness about us, but only wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores, such as the state in which we're all born, such is the state in which we naturally live. We are in once sense dead long before we are laid in the grave. Our bodies may be healthy and active, but our souls are by nature dead in trespasses and sins. But there is no spiritual leprosy too hard for

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Christ." Amen to that. There is no spiritual leprosy too hard for Christ. He is willing. He is able to cleanse all who come.

Folks, that's not the end of the story. The cleansing from defilement and leprosy was only the beginning of even a full restoration. And that brings us to points two and three in our outline, and as I look at the time, the enemy has told me I can't go on. So, I'm going to stop it right here and we're going to just pause, and I think the Lord just wants us to reflect on this first point, amen?

Let me close in prayer. Father, I just want to thank you for the time we've had in understanding the depth of our own depravity. We don't really rejoice in that, in and of itself. It's a terrible disease we've been afflicted with and it's not even diseases like leprosy or cancer or AIDS or any other, any other physical affliction. The worst virus on this earth is the sin virus. It's the one that only has a cure that's found in Jesus Christ. And we want to come to you Lord Jesus, that you might cleanse us from all of our uncleanness.