

## Jesus Wow! Series Part 9

### Jesus Heals a Leper

Pastor Andrew Neville 7/6/20

Mark 1: 40-45

#### Sermon Summary

A high-profile televangelist in the United States, recently blew into the camera, declaring that his breath was that of God designed to blow the Covid-19 virus away from America. He declared the US to be free of the pandemic, then demanded a vaccine to be produced immediately. He concluded that folk should still continue with their giving to his ministry.

The demanding prayers have not produced results.

Today's text Mark 1: 40-45 recounts Jesus' healing a leper. How did he do it, and how was it different from the televangelist?

1<sup>st</sup> century humans were probably in better shape overall than we are today. But they still got sick, still had accidents, and still required healing, even if the results of the latter were few and far between. For some diseases, banishment was the only answer. Leading this diabolical lot was the affliction of leprosy. To be a leper was to be numbered with the "living dead". They were outcasts, wearing the same rags day after day, usually with head and face covered; the disfiguring disease was without mercy to any part of the body, often rendering the extremities frightening to look at.

A Pharmacopoeia (medical instructions) of ancient times is the book of Leviticus in which the priest inherited the function of physician as part of his priestly ministrations. For it was the priest's job to examine the person and discover whether the problem was to be declared *clean or unclean*. At God's insistence, a skin disease was as much a theological issue as a medical one. To meet with Yahweh in His sacred (pure and undefiled) place meant that many purification processes were required beforehand.

Leviticus 13:45-46 describes, for the unclean leper, banishment from the culture; they became outsiders. Banishment was **NOT** a punishment for the disease; it was about maintaining the purity of the sacred space, and, indirectly of course, isolating the diseased as we do today with pandemics. Leprosy is a bacterial infection spread by coughing and sneezing; the face covering requirements of Leviticus are an early example of modern face masks. Skin diseases were uncontrollable in the first century; corticosteroid treatment is relatively new [only in my lifetime. Prior to that it was Sulphur and tar preparations!] Despite the obvious and highly visible dress code, the leper was still obligated to shout out, "unclean" to any approaching person.

The rabbis added further conditions onto the hapless leper, which resulted in further isolating requirements. Basically, it resulted in the leper's being alone in his or her misery, despite their congregating in colonies for mutual existence. For a person to be declared healed, that person had to be referred to a priest and be declared "clean."

Today's text, Mark 1: 40-45, concerns the healing of a leper by Jesus.

In this era, leprosy covered many skin diseases, including dermatitis, eczema, boils, bites, in fact anything that was not otherwise immediately recognizable. The leper probably came out of the crowd, since Jesus seemed to constantly collect people around him, and it appears the leper did not call out the warning about his condition, but simply fell on his knees and begged for healing. He understood the power and authority Jesus possessed for healing, but was humble enough to express the knowledge that Jesus was not obliged to act upon his power, hence his plea, "If you are willing". Jesus healed him. But He gave him two instructions: Don't tell anyone, and go see a priest to carry out the Levitical requirements. But the leper did not obey – he told everybody!

When the leper approached Jesus, he did so humbly (on his knees), and called him "Lord" (Matthew 8:2). He also had great faith; he asked, "If you are willing". This indicated he knew that Jesus had the power and the authority, but he did not know if Jesus wanted to heal him.

Thus, we have 3 points to this healing that we need to know for our own requests either personally, or on behalf of others: humility, faith, and being within God's will (His sovereignty). Know that God is both willing and able to heal as Jesus was with the leper.

The televangelist demanded (showing no humility); he asked arrogantly (expecting immediacy). Nothing happened! To claim this an apostolic ministry is false. The only people to be called apostles were the original twelve chosen by Jesus plus the one chosen to replace Judas and the special calling of Paul by Jesus. Jesus wanted Paul's brain to explain the gospel to the Gentiles.

Today, when we pray, we may be asking that God bless the medicines to work, to bless the skill of a surgeon, and to comfort the afflicted person's situation – knowing that not all our prayers will be answered immediately. Some prayers will be answered eventually, and some ultimately, that is, the other side of mortal death. We tend to think that all of Jesus' life followed a prescriptive path. Much of it was an immediate reaction to a crisis placed in his path – such as this leper. Sometimes we feel as though Jesus is distant – far away from us, but He is not.

We lay hold of Jesus today as all have done down the ages. Jesus is close to all believers. The same sympathetic outreach Jesus showed to the leper those many years ago is available to us today. Jesus did not run away from the leper, though his appearance was disfigured and his form marred; he turned to him and made him clean.

When Jesus told the leper not to tell anyone, he did so because his primary task was **NOT** to build a fan club in the manner of the modern televangelist; his task was to bring the

Kingdom of God to planet Earth. Jesus and the leper changed places at that moment. Jesus became the lonely one (going off to lonely places) while the leper's proclaiming of his healing, which attracted many, tended to give the wrong message to the people – they gathered together in even greater crowds, looking for a healing rather than a totally transformed life.

### Discussion Questions

**Read Mark 1:40-45.**

1. Before the evening's discussion, Google Leper's Squint for a glimpse into a past segregation of lepers in society.
2. How do we treat outcasts of our society today? How or what do you define as an outcast?
3. Do you have to be a perfect Christian with a perfect theology and a perfect faith for God to answer your prayers for healing?
4. What is the difference between a fan of Jesus and a follower of Jesus?
5. What is your own experience with praying for healing? Have you or others been healed as a result? How do you know?
6. How many remember the charismatic/Pentecostal healing meetings of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century? Did they appeal to you? Did they concern you or mystify you? Did you witness any of the allied movements of speaking in tongues or falling under the Spirit? How did you feel about such happenings? Have your views changed? Explain.