

Rev John Davidson - Jesus Heals a Leper

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] in Mark's Gospel chapter one, Mark one, and we'll read again, verse 41. Mark one, I think we'll take us our verse, verse 41, moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean.

And immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean. The young boy named Jack is 10 years old. He is smaller and he is less athletic than the rest of the boys his age.

And he's out on the football park and two of the more honored boys, that is two of the more cooler boys, they are captains of the teams.

And they select their teams from a pool of eager footballers. Back and forth they pick their teams and of course the best players are obviously they get chosen first.

And the selection pool gets smaller and smaller. And with each pick the remaining boys, including Jack, they become increasingly self-conscious.

[1 : 18] Then they become embarrassed. You see, Shem is reserved for the last boy standing. He's picked last as Jack.

Slowly head down, he heads towards his team. The teams are chosen, they are complete. The opposing team laughs.

His team groans. You see, this Shem seems to be contagious.

The young boy seems to spread it to his teammates. Jack doesn't hear the captain say, hey lads, we're all in this together. No.

You see, Jack will be the scapegoat for his team's loss. For young Jack, the experience might pass. Who knows, the rejected boy one day may become the powerful CEO, chief executive of a large company where he does the picking and the rejecting.

[2 : 28] Who knows? If so, perhaps the curse of that old, shameful day might disappear or might be reversed.

But you see, it is not always that easy. More often than not, scratch the surface of this chief executive, Jack.

And underneath, you will see the rejected 10-year-old boy. Still hearing the derision and the laughter of his teammates.

It's a powerful story. A leper in the passage here, he understood what Jack felt every day of his life. Because he lived it every day.

He lived the life of isolation and he lived the life of shame. We're going to look at three topics.

[3 : 27] In this little pericopa scripture here, the first one is shame. Not very politically correct to talk about such a thing as shame. But the Bible talks about it, so we will talk about it.

The second subject we're going to look at is providence. And the third is reconciliation, praise God. The third will be reconciliation.

You see verse 40, what does the scripture tell us? And a leper came to him. And to understand our leper's predicament, we must enter into his world.

His world of loneliness outside of the camp. Outside of the camp. We must enter into his world of rules and regulations.

To understand our text, we must enter into his world of the clean and the unclean. The world of honour and the world of shame. But first, to understand our leper, we must understand his physical condition.

[4 : 34] You see, our man suffered from what is known today as Hansen's disease. After the man who diagnosed its cause. You see, it is not a rotting infection as was first thought.

What happens with leprosy is the body's natural warning system for pain. It is destroyed, it is wiped out. The disease works as an anesthetic against pain.

If you were a leper and if you were to stick your hand in a coal fire, you would not feel it. Hence the physical deformities that we know of that come with leprosy.

According to Luke and his account of this story, the man was full of leprosy. From head to toe. Josephus, a first century historian, describes those afflicted with the disease as a no way differing from a corpse.

[5 : 37] For rabbis in Jesus' day call them the living dead. As if that was not bad enough for our friend the leper here this evening.

He had to follow the mosaic law. Where he had to live outside of the camp away from people. Now if you were to turn to Leviticus 13 and to Leviticus 14 in your Bibles, you would see all the rules and all the regulations concerning leprosy and other skin diseases.

You see lepers had to live in little huts no bigger than dog kennels. In camps or in colonies outside of the towns. It's interesting to note that rabbinical law, not the law of Moses, but rabbinical law, the extra laws they added, rabbinical law stipulated one could not greet a leper.

If you were upwind of a leper you had to keep a distance of 45 metres. If you were walking downwind of a leper you had to stay away by 5 metres.

I don't think they told us how much there was no wind. You see, if you had contacted this disease you left all behind.

[7 : 10] You left your family, you left your work, you would have to leave the synagogue, the worship place, and your motto would be, or my motto would be, I am unclean.

I am unclean. That's the motto of a leper here. Every time a leper would pass somebody he would have to cry that out, I am unclean, I am unclean.

They just pictured a leper. Perhaps he had a wife and family, and perhaps he would see them in the distance. And he'd have to cry out his motto, my loved ones, I am unclean, I am unclean.

That was the life of the leper. Unclean, unclean. You see, leprosy was not so much a disease as it was a sentence.

So there we have this physical condition. How about a spiritual condition? To understand our leper spiritual condition we have to venture into the Old Testament.

[8 : 31] And in Leviticus 10:10 the Lord God says this to His servant Moses, you are to distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean.

You see, with these four categories, God gives us the basic building blocks of the spiritual universe in which we live.

You will find yourself and I will find myself and everything else in this universe in two of the four groups. Now there are no prizes this evening for guessing which category our leper was in.

You see, by all Testament terms, you could not be a little clean, or a sort of unclean, you are one or the other.

You see, by all Testament categories and in this spiritual universe given to us by the Lord God and going back to the Old Testament, clean is acceptable.

[9 : 40] Unclean is defiled and cast out. Touching a dead body, for instance, would make you defiled. Idolatry obviously, it's all over the Old Testament, it made them defiled skin diseases as we have here.

Many other things made a person in the Old Testament unclean and at the time of Christ made them unclean also. You see, clean is normal.

Unclean is abnormal. You see, the clean can't cleanse the unclean, but the unclean can contaminate the clean.

For one reason the unclean, such as our leper, are separated away from the clean. You see, if you are unclean, there is something wrong with you.

You are not like other people. You stick out and you are kicked out.

[10 : 48] And in the Bible, if you look for the word defiled, you will find the unclean. Cut off and untouchable, where the unclean such as our leper, you see they needed to be cleansed.

Sometimes by offering animal sacrifices that we see in the Old Testament and the Lord God himself gave this system of sacrifices for people to become clean.

You see, you didn't want to find yourself in the category of the unclean. Scripture also talks about the pure.

Scripture also talks about the uncontaminated or the upright. If you are pure or uncontaminated or upright or clean, you are able to go to the temple to worship if you are clean.

So that is one category. Now it will all come together in a moment. Before we move on there is another category. Very briefly, we have the holy and we have the common.

[11:58] Now the category of the holy is all about God. God is set apart.

He is completely holy and completely separate from his creation. And when you turn toward the holy, your attention is directed toward him, the holy one.

You see, he alone is holy, but listen to this. And anything that he declares holy becomes holy.

They are uniquely his. These things were honoured. You will remember from the Scriptures the Garden of Eden was holy because the Lord dwelt in it and he made it holy.

You will remember Mount Sinai where the Lord God would come down and meet Moses. That was holy because the Lord came down upon it. The temple in Jerusalem, of course, obviously was holy because it is where the Lord came to meet with his people.

[13:07] When they came to worship him. Certain days were holy. The Sabbath day is still holy. Certain feasts were holy.

These things were consecrated. These things were made holy or they were dedicated to the Lord. The holy category. You see, people too could become holy or sacred.

They belonged to the realm of the common, obviously. But to be holy, you obviously had to be clean. But clean didn't naturally make you holy. Only a few in the Old Testament were holy, such as the priests.

You see, holy means that a person is completely devoted to God. The person or thing that belongs to God and thereby shares in his holiness.

The Bible tells us it is set apart. Set apart. While the unclean were set apart, so were the holy.

[14:13] You see, the holy were set apart because of their special relationship to the holy God who built this spiritual universe in which we live.

They would be uniquely honored. Yet there is one peculiarity in all of this. And bear with me.

In Leviticus 11 and at verse 45, the Lord says this, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt to be your God.

You shall therefore be holy for I am holy. You might be sitting there and you're probably sitting there this evening going, why is he telling me about all of this?

Why do I need to know all about these Old Testament categories from the book of Leviticus? Well, the reason is, if we want to understand the predicament of our leper, we must understand the world in which he lived.

[15:25] And more importantly, if we want to understand the salvation that our leper is just about to receive from the Lord Jesus Christ, we must understand the world in which he lived.

And there is another reason. It is this. It's because you and I and our friend the leper, we fit into one or two of these categories ourselves even today.

Leave aside the category of the common. Leave that aside. What do we have? We have unclean, we have clean and we have holy. You see, sin has left us in the category of the unclean.

Isaiah 64, 6, we have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. You see, his spiritual condition is our spiritual condition outside of Jesus Christ. His spiritual condition is our spiritual condition outside of Jesus Christ, but more on that later. If sin comes, shame.

[16:49] You see, shame is one of the most powerful emotions that we can ever feel. It's more powerful than guilt. And you'll be surprised to know, or maybe not surprised to know, that the Bible talks more about shame than it ever did about guilt.

And the leper knew all about shame. But the leper knew what this remedy for shame was and the remedy was a divine encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But more on that later. So this powerful emotion of shame. Our leper lived a life of shame that only Jesus could do anything about.

You know, this man was not any lesser or greater a sinner than you and I. Yet he lived a life of shame because of his leprosy.

He was in the category of the unclean and he knew it. He knew it. Ed Welch in his book, listen to the title of the book, Shame Interrupted, How God Lifted the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection.

[18:03] Isn't that a beautiful title? Listen to it again. Shame interrupted, how God lifts the pain of worthlessness and rejection. And this is what he says. He describes shame in this way.

It is that deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, or something done to you, or something associated with you.

You feel exposed and you feel humiliated. There is no description for you. This is the life our leper lived until he met Jesus of Nazareth.

Homer the Greek poet said this about shame. Shame greatly hurts or greatly helps mankind. Our leper, shame was crude, shame was intrusive, shame was demanding, and shame was relenting. Day in and day out, he felt his shame. You see when we talk about shame, don't expect subtlety or refined manners.

[19 : 28] Don't forget shame's public nature. You see guilt can be hidden. We can hide away guilt. But shame feels like it is always exposed.

Our man the leper lived this quiet killer, that is shame. That is what it is, it's a quiet killer. Welch and his book describes some basics about the emotion like this.

He says it is life dominating and it sure was for the leper. It is life dominating and it is stubborn and once it is entrenched in your heart and once it is entrenched in your mind, it is like a squatter that refuses to leave.

That is shame. You see to be human is to feel shame at one point or another in our lives, is it not? You see what we have here in our text is a picture of you and I.

Do you see that? It's a picture of our spiritual condition outside of Jesus Christ. A picture of complete corruption that should shame us.

[20 : 35] Sin should shame us. You see without Christ we are spiritual lepers and we have no hope of cleansing by ourselves, apart from Christ.

Apart from Christ we are unclean. As children of God in here this evening, each and every one of us has a testimony to tell.

Each and every one of us knows our own backgrounds. My own background was one of sin and shame until I met Jesus of Nazareth.

I know this from personal experience. It's only Jesus that can deal with shame and sin.

You see Mark's Gospel is a book of miracles. In fact it records more of Christ's miracles than even his sermons. Now this does not mean that Mark is not a book of teaching.

[21 : 41] There's a lot of teaching in Mark. Mark, inspired by the Holy Spirit when he wrote this Gospel, he is very clever in the way he does this.

Kent Hughes in his commentary explains, all Christ's miracles were parables which visibly portrayed the effects of the Spirit's work among mankind.

For instance, he says, the healing of the blind, portrayed the illumination of darkened hearts, the coming of the storm, told of his power to bring peace to troubled hearts, raising the dead, proclaimed his life, giving power.

His feeding of the 5,000 spoke of his being the bread of life. How about our story of the leper here? Well, R.C. Trench, the Greek scholar, and to the man who was the inspiration for the very first English Oxford Dictionary.

Listen to what he says. Though the leper was not worse or guiltier than his fellow countrymen, he was nevertheless a parable of sin, an outward visible sign of innermost spiritual corruption.

[22 : 58] Hughes says, the nature of leprosy with its insidious, slow and subtle beginnings, its slow progress, its destructive power, its ultimate ruin, it brings, makes it a powerful symbol of morality, poverty.

It is a picture of me and it's a picture of you without Christ. Our leper was isolated, he was ashamed, and then he met Jesus.

Have you met Jesus? Have you answered the call from Jesus?

You see, here we have providence like no other. Here we have a divine appointment. You see, a leper becomes shameless.

And he approached Jesus in verse 40 and he says, imploring him and kneeling said to him, if you will, you can make me clean.

[24 : 09] If you will, you can make me clean. Now let's look at this providence. You see, the leper knows his condition. He could easily have approached Jesus in a very different manner and said, look at me, look at the life I must live.

I see all these healthy people every day and I'm like this, why am I like this? He could have talked about his rotten lot, perhaps he could have talked about his rights.

No, no, he simply cries out at the top of his voice, if you will, you can make me clean. You know, he did not fall into the trap that Peter fell into. Just before the Lord Jesus was leaving his disciples, Jesus commanded Peter to follow him and told him in cryptic terms that he also would be crucified.

And Peter then points to John, do you remember in chapter 21 of John's Gospel, what about him? What about him? What did Jesus say? Never mind him, you follow me.

[25 : 16] No, our leper did not fall into that trap. You know, the Bible also teaches us that there are times even in our own Christian experience where we may look at other people and we may envy them.

And we look at other Christians and we think they have no troubles. They seem to just glide on through. The psalmist in Psalm 73 thought that, looking at his fellow believer.

The psalmist says in Psalm 73 verses 3 to 4, I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked for they have no pangs until death, their bodies are fat and sleek, they are not in trouble as others shall.

No, our leper did not fall into the same trap that the psalmist in Psalm 73 fell into, you know. He knew his condition and he cried out, if you will, you can make me clean.

This is the story of a Prussian king. Frederick the Great was his name and he was once touring a Berlin prison. And as he was touring through the prison, all the prisoners fell on their knees before him and they all proclaimed their innocence.

[26 : 32] I am innocent, I am innocent, except for one man who remained absolutely silent. And Frederick called to him and he says, why, why are you here?

I am robbery your majesty. And are you guilty? Yes indeed your majesty, I deserve my punishment. And then Frederick then summoned the jailer and ordered him and he said to the jailer, release this guilty wretch at once.

I will not have him in this prison corrupting all these fine innocent people. He knew his condition, he knew he was guilty. So did our leper.

And then thirdly and finally, we have reconciliation, praise God, we have reconciliation. In the response of Jesus we see nothing but love and nothing but compassion.

Verse 41 tells us he was moved, that is Jesus, he was moved with pity. He stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean.

[27 : 45] And now we see Jesus take control of the whole situation. And he shows the leper and he shows all the other bystanders that he is the master and he is the commander of all of these Old Testament categories that we were talking about earlier.

He is basically saying I am the Son of God, I am the Son of God, moved with pity.

Face to face we have the perfect Son of God. And this man who is full of sin and full of shame and the Son of God is filled with compassion and moved with pity.

You know it is probably the first time in many a long year that anyone has ever listened to him. Never mind, touch him. The text tells us the Lord is filled with compassion.

You see the compassion that Jesus felt, he felt it in his stomach. Listen to David McKenna, he describes it thus, he says it was not just mind for mind, hand for hand or even heart for heart, but stomach for stomach, blood for blood, gut for gut.

[29 : 15] Jesus fills his way into the leper's needs. You see in the ancient world if you wanted to describe or show compassion towards someone you would feel it in your stomach.

Today of course we talk about the heart, not so in the ancient world it was the stomach. Alexander McLaren says this, he pitied not only in order to teach us the heart of God, but because his own man's heart was touched with a feeling of men's infirmities.

Not only does Jesus pity us, he understands us. Isn't that beautiful? Not only does he pity us, he understands us.

He stretched out his hand and he touched him. Westport says there was more than just superficial contact here. You see this phrase touched, you see there is more to it.

It is often translated he took hold of, he took hold of.

[30 : 24] You see Jesus wants this leper and he wants you and he wants me.

Not only to hear from him, but also to feel it. He in essence is saying to the leper I understand you. I love you. I am going to do something for you. I will help you and that is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ when the Gospel is preached says to each and every one of us.

I love you. I have created you. I am willing to help you. I can save you. I can transform you. I can change you and I can give you treasures beyond what you can possibly imagine. You see he did not have to touch him to cleanse him. And we sit back here and we marvel. And we marvel at the very humanness of the Lord Jesus.

[31 : 45] And we see here his very emotions. We see here this pity that he has for this leper. As Hebrews teaches us this and this is foundational.

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers, that is Jesus. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of his people.

Jesus had to become like us in order to touch us. What we have here is a small picture of the incarnation. That is the Lord God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, his son.

The one who would leave glory to come and to save that which was lost. You see no incarnation. If there was no incarnation there would be no touch for the leper or for you and I.

If there was no incarnation there would be no cleansing. No incarnation there would be no healing. There would be no salvation. There would be no glory. There would be no hope for Sinesh but there is hope for Sinesh.

[33 : 05] Because he stretched out his hand and embraced him. Do you see what the Lord Jesus is saying to the leper and to me and you this evening? He is saying I will swap places with you.

I will become the one who will be rejected. I will be the one who will become isolated and lonely. I will be the one who will be cast out of the camp so that you can come into the camp.

That is what the Lord Jesus Christ says to us. And to the leper I will swap places with you. I will carry all of your sin and I will carry all of your shame.

And I will carry it up a hill and I will go to a place called Golgotha and I will be crucified for you.

So that you can have life, so that you can have cleansing and so that you can have eternal life with me.

[34 : 12] That is what he is saying to the leper and that is what he is saying to you and I this evening. Galatians teaches us this Paul's words.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

Therein you have the Gospel. That is the message of hope that we preach.

That is the message of hope that we have from God's word. We must let the Lord Jesus deal with all of our shame, all of our sin.

And we must let the Lord Jesus deal with it all. You see, he understands. And he wants us all to come to faith and to come to repentance and to turn away from our sin and our wrongdoing.

[35 : 26] And to live for him. Where each and every one of us can say, I belong to Jesus.

Let's get technical just before I close. It's the doctrine of justification by faith alone because Christ has done it for us.

He has died the death we deserve to die because of our sin and because of our shame.

Outside of scripture, I am yet to find a description of justification by faith alone as warm and as heartfelt as I find in the Heidelbergcatechism.

The Heidelbergcatechism was written at the time of the Reformation in Heidelberg by two 20-something year olds who were touched by Jesus and converted.

[36 : 32] They became professors in Heidelberg University. And along with the Belgique Confession and along with the Kellens of Dort, they are the three pillars of reformed theology and orthodoxy to this day.

Of course, we have the Westminster Confession of faith add that to it as well. Now listen to question 60, to the question and to the answer.

The question is, how are you righteous before God? Now I'll give you a moment to think about how you would answer that question. How are you righteous before God?

Listen to this answer. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ, although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all of God's commandments and I have never kept any of them and I am still inclined toward all evil.

Yet, see that we word, yet God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ.

[37 : 50] And He grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me.

If only I accept this gift with a believing heart. Isn't that wonderful? That wonderful.

Do you see what's on offer in the Gospel tonight? Perhaps you've been a Christian for decades. Well, this is a reminder to us of what Christ has done for us and our standing if we're in Christ before God.

And do you know the beauty of it all? It is open to all. As ministers of the Gospel, we are instructed to preach the free offer of the Gospel to all.

And let the Lord do the work. Have you accepted Jesus? Do you know Jesus?

[39 : 05] Are you going to walk out of here if you're not a Christian again tonight and say no? That Jesus deal with it all? He grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin.

And as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me. Jesus swapped places with the leper and in essence Jesus has swapped places with every Christian that has ever lived.

He has done it for us. What a saviour. Perhaps tonight is the night where you must accept this gift. Let us pray. Eternal God indeed we thank you for your word and we thank you for the Gospel of free grace that is offered to all. Father we pray that your Holy Spirit is at work, as your word is preached. And Lord I pray that if there is anything I have said that is amiss this evening that you would forgive me. Heavenly Father I pray that each and every one of us will be built up in the faith this evening and sanctified by your word and seeing the Lord Jesus for who he is and for what he has done.

[40 : 30] What a glorious saviour we serve. Oh glorious God go before us all this evening. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. We shall conclude by singing Psalm 147, Psalm 147, Verses Mark 1 to 8.

Praise ye the Lord for it is good. Praise to our God to sing. For it is pleasant and to praise it is a comely thing.

And we are going to sing down to the verse Mark 8, who covereth the heavens with clouds, who for the earth below prepareth rain, who maketh grass upon the mountains go. So that's Psalm 147, Verses 1 to 8. To God's praise and glory.