

Jesus meets a leper

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2021

Preacher: Jeremy Ross

[0 : 0 0] Well, if you've got a Bible, it would be good if you would open it, please, at Luke chapter 5. And I want to think with you today of the story of Jesus healing this man with leprosy. I'm sure that over the past year, most of us have been occupied in some way with COVID. We're scared of it. We're scared that it would kill us if we got it. We're scared that if we got it, we would end up breathless or on a ventilator. We're scared of long COVID, of this complicated illness that seems difficult to treat. We're scared of the effects of COVID. We're scared of what it means for worship, for school. We'd really like it to end because a lot of us would love just to jet off into the sun and not have to ever wear a face mask again. We're scared of what it can do.

We've got a glimmer of hope that restrictions are going to be lifted. But when we think of COVID, 99.9% of people who get it are going to recover from it. 99.9%. We've been scared of something that will kill less than 0.1% of those who get it or thereabouts. I'm not a statistician. I could have that a little bit wrong. But I think one of the things that we've started to do, like we do with most things in society, is we think, we can fix this. We can fix this with good management. We can fix this with a vaccine. We can fix this with good care, looking after ourselves. It's kind of the same with cancer, I think. It was a death sentence 30 years ago. But now it's still scary. Don't wish to belittle it.

But we think we can fix this. We can manage this. And even when it comes to near the end, we like to think we can keep it under control. Palliative care is wonderful. God bless palliative care. But we think we can do this. And one of the signs that we think we can do it is we get really irritated with our leaders in Scotland and England and wherever if we think they're not doing it right.

We think that we could do it better than them. At least I do, and I've been proven wrong in that many times. We think we can fix things. When it comes to this story of the leper, I guess most of you, if I say to you, the leper's only hope was Jesus, you go, yeah, I agree. The leper's only hope was Jesus. Move on and tell me why or what Jesus could do.

But I think we need to think a little bit more about this leper. I think we need to see how with all of our problems, there are such big problems that Jesus is our only hope. And that's what I really want to show you today, that we need to meet with this Jesus who is our only hope.

[3 : 2 4] So I want you to imagine with me that this leper has a name. He doesn't have a name here, but let's call him Zach. And let's imagine his story. I'm not adding to God's Word and saying this is the way it definitely was, but I want you to try and walk with him for a little while. But five years ago, Zach was a happy family man. He ran a little bazaar, a sort of cafe, fast food place on the edge of town.

He gave people food. He sold them food as they came into the markets from the countryside or as they traveled through. He was married. He had three children. And so he'd be working out the front with his wife, helping him. And then his children would be out the back playing and you'd hear them laughing and you'd hear him shouting at them and tripping over them. But they would be the reason he smiled during the day. He loved his family. Of course, with so much interaction with people, like he didn't have to wear a face mask, neither did the travelers. And so after a while, he noticed there were spots in his hands. And what did he do? He didn't go quite to the doctor. He went to the priest. And the priest was qualified according to the law in Leviticus to look at him and say, yes, leprosy. Go away. Go outside. Pack your stuff. Don't kiss your wife goodbye.

Don't pick up your children and give them one last hug. Go. And so Zach goes out and he lives in the leper colony. He's alone, but he's surrounded by other people who are like him. Some of his friends that he's made there have died. His wife tried to keep running the business and send some money to him for food, but it was too much. And well, is she really his wife anymore? He's not allowed to even touch her. At first, he would walk into town and he'd shout, unclean, unclean, and people would stay away from him. But now, five years on, he shuffles into town. And he doesn't need to shout so loud because he smells so bad that people stay away from him anyway. The sores are open. And if he gets bitten by a dog or if he steps on a nail, he doesn't feel it. He's got no feeling anymore. And so the wounds that were coming from the outside, coming out from the inside out, then they start to make him sick from the outside in. He's just in a desperately hopeless situation. That's Zach. That's him. That's what he's like. He can't find a way to stop this. He can't fix it himself. He has no way of making himself clean. And you feel sorry for him, or you should feel sorry for him. You would feel sorry for him. It's quite a stark condition that he has, isn't it? It's not something just to gloss over.

If we knew somebody with a story like that, oh, what a sad story it would be. And he meets Jesus. And he says to Jesus, ah, if you are willing. He begs. He goes down on the ground.

He's been a beggar. Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. And Jesus, the only one who can, does this for him. Well, that's what it could have been like.

[7:17] It might not have been as bad as that. It might have been worse than that, that this man had suffered a lot. But what I want to tell you is that this picture of leprosy is in the Bible kind of like sin, that it's not too different from sin. If we turn to Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 6, the nation has rebelled against God. What does the nation look like?

From the sole of your foot to the top of your head, there is no soundness, only wounds and bruises and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

The nation is like a nation with leprosy. It's broken. It's breaking. You perhaps know the story of Naaman who had leprosy. Jesus speaks about going to people like Naaman in Luke chapter 4, people on the outside. But how did Naaman get cured of his leprosy?

Go and wash in the water seven times, as the man of God tells you. Go and wash. Now, it would be easy if it was just you washed leprosy away, but this is special. There's a special washing, kind of like sin. You remember when Jesus meets the blind man in John chapter 9, he rubs mud in his eyes and he tells him to go and wash. And the man went and washed and came home seeing. And that, in John chapter 9, that man's blindness is a picture of the blindness of sin that the Pharisees have later. Leprosy is a bit like that. Leprosy in Leviticus chapter 13 and 14, we learn how to deal with leprosy. It's not that pleasant. You do go to the priest and the priest tells you what you're like. And he says, you have to tell everybody you're unclean. You have to leave.

But you can be brought back in. And he tells them how to do that. But leprosy, we go, yeah, okay, because it's an old problem. And it's a bit of a distant problem for us. We might have supported a leprosy mission or something, but it's not a problem that's right in our faces right now. So, we don't see it as a big thing. And what I'm wanting to tell you is that it's a big thing.

[9 : 42] It's a big thing in your life. Not leprosy, the physical disease, but the picture of sin. Sin is a big thing. Sin is a massive problem. Sin breaks into your life. Sin comes from the inside and makes us ugly on the outside. Sin comes from the outside and makes us ugly on the inside. We are just destroyed by it. It comes from within us and we do stupid things. People do horrible things to us and we are not how we should be. We feel shame. We are broken. And sin, breaking God's laws, it leads to death. And we can't just wash it away. We can't just stop it happening. We can't fix this all on our own. It leads to death. It's not that 99.9% of us will survive it.

It's that 100% of us have got it. And it's infectious. I'm sorry. If you know me long enough, I'll probably cause you to sin. I've got a slappable face. It's like that. But you were born, how? Psalm 51, in iniquity and sin. It comes. We can't stop it from coming.

Enter Jesus. Enter Jesus into the town. And this man goes to Jesus because he can't do anything himself. He will have tried every trick in the book, every home cure. He'll have been desperate, but nothing could do it. No one else could help him. And in his hopeless situation, he has hope that Jesus could.

And what does he say? If you're willing, you can make me clean. And the story is Jesus is willing. Jesus can immediately make you clean. And he does it with a word and a touch, or a touch and a word.

And he says, go, go see the priest, make a sacrifice, do what you should do. And shh, don't tell anybody. Don't tell anybody how this happened to you. That's the story.

[12 : 15] Well, what do we see in the man, and what do we see in Jesus? What do we see in the man with that question? Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

We see, I'm going to call it uncertain faith. Uncertain faith is what you believe, but he's not quite sure if you are willing. He's not sure Jesus can. He's sure Jesus can, but he's not sure that Jesus would be willing to do it. Perhaps he's heard stories of what Jesus has done. Perhaps he's been to other people before who have said they might and would only do it if he gave money.

Why does he say if you are willing? Well, I guess a lot of us resonate with this man. I resonate with this man. I grew up in a Christian home. I learned the Bible. I knew the stories. I believed they were all true. I believed there was a God in heaven, and there was a man called Moses, and there was a prophet called Isaiah, and a songwriter called David, and I believe God sent his Son. And God sent his Son to be my Savior, who would die on the cross, and who would do that, and who had done it, and that Jesus had now gone up to heaven. I believed it. But the big question I had was, what about me? Am I really saved because Jesus did this? And I think that's kind of where the man was. He knew the stories about Jesus. He believed them to be true, but about me, would Jesus really do this for me? How do I get it? And if you admit it, if you admit it, you're still there today, even if you're a long-in-the-tooth Christian. You believe Jesus died for your sins. You believe Jesus is the only Son of God. You believe that there's no other way to be saved. And because of what you said to your sister last night, because of what you looked at on the internet, because of the way that you swore, or how you lost your temper, or just how cold your heart is, you think that today Jesus doesn't love you. That He's able, but you know, you, you're not getting any more of Jesus' grace because you don't deserve it. Is it just me that thinks like that? Or are you a little bit like that too?

Because that's the biggest trick that the devil has for Christians like us, is to make us think, Jesus doesn't love me anymore. That He would be willing. He might, He's able, but He's fed up of me now.

Well, aren't we glad that that's not the gospel story? That as we go to Jesus, not only is He able, not only is He willing, He is able, and He's able to save us. See, that's what we see in Jesus. He is able to cure us. I am willing, and I am able. Able to destroy death, is that being our only hope when things have gone wrong in a life that we love? Jesus is able to destroy the power of not leprosy, not this thing that's eaten our skin, but this thing that is destroying us, this thing that we can't stop, this thing that so easily trips us up again, this thing that leads to death. Is Jesus able to stop it? Well, what evidence have we? In this story, we've got the evidence that He cured the man. Immediately, the leprosy left Him. I am willing, be clean. Immediately, the leprosy left Him. So, we see that Jesus is able. And I want you to remember what it says in Hebrews. It's interesting. We don't have too much time to go into it, but you have a man who would normally have to go to the priest, and the priest would pronounce Him clean.

[16 : 51] When you turn to Hebrews chapter 7, you discover that Jesus is the priest. Jesus is the priest after the order of Melchizedek. He's a priest forever, and He is the priest, the writer to the Hebrews, tells us. He is the priest who is able to save completely those who come to God through Him because He always lives to intercede for them. When we think of our sin, when we think of our big problem, He is able to cleanse us from it, whatever it is. You know, with a leper, with a leper, there's problems pretty obvious. But I want you to try and think of what are the marks of your sin? What are the marks on your body or in your soul that is from your brokenness?

The things we've done to ourselves, the things other people have done to us, the wrong thinking that we have, the habitual problems that we keep going to, He is able to save to the uttermost. It is life-transforming.

If anybody here is struggling with a certain thing, that you would know that Jesus is able to save you completely from it. There's not a part of your life that Jesus is not good news for.

There's not a part of your life that the good news of Jesus cannot redeem, ultimately. Hold on to that hope. But is He willing? Is He willing? That's the question.

And so the man, why does He ask that question? Why does He ask, are you willing to cleanse me? Had He been to so many people who would say no? Had He heard stories of what Jesus had done and think, well, He'll not be bothered with me? Had He had constant rejection from everyone else?

[18 : 59] He's ashamed of His situation. And Jesus is willing. And what does Jesus do? Well, He reaches out His hand and touches the man and He says, I am willing, be clean. And immediately the leprosy left Him. What did Jesus do? What should you not do if you see a leper in Jesus' community?

Touch Him. Don't touch Him. Don't touch Him. Don't touch your dad, kids. Don't touch Him. You'll be sick like Him.

Jesus touches him. Why? Because Jesus is the one who enters into our brokenness. He who knew no sin became sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. He touches Him. And in that touch, or is it in His Word, there's healing. There's newness. Don't you see when Jesus commands him, be clean, that you're listening to the Creator of the world?

God said, let there be, and there was. And in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God. He was with God in the beginning. Without Him nothing was made, which has been made. And we see here the willingness and the power to cleanse a man, to do what the man needs with that word. And we are reminded of what 2 Peter 3 and verse 9 says. The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. And when we ask, is He willing?

This is what He's willing to do. Now we're back to the man. Go and see the priest. If you want to see what He should do, read Leviticus 13 and 14, you'll see that He should go and a sacrifice should be made.

[21 : 15] And after the sacrifice is made, the man can be pronounced clean. But don't tell anybody why not, because Jesus is not ready for that to be said, for this man to proclaim like this. It's just a timing thing we would think just now. But isn't it interesting, the place of sacrifice, so a priest can pronounce you clean. What sacrifice has been made for my sin, so that that priest, Jesus, can pronounce me clean. He has given Himself for us, for me, so that I might be clean. Okay, we've had a story. We've looked at what we should do just as we finish.

What will you take home with you? What can you pack in your bags and think about as we go? Well, has anybody still got leprosy? Is anybody still uncured from the disease of sin? Is anybody still going to die in their sins?

Young, old, you've only got one way that you can be cured from this illness. There's only one way that your sin is not going to lead to your death and your punishment, and that is to go to Jesus. And you know what? He's able, He can save you, and He wants to save you.

And if you've not yet asked Him, you ask Him just now. You ask Him until you know He is willing and able to save you, and you trust Him. And if you haven't spoken to your mum or dad about it, or to anybody about it, whoever you are, speak to somebody and ask them to pray that you'd be clean as well.

It's your greatest need. Then I want us to think, how can we be like Jesus? In Dunfermline, we've started something this year which I'm trying to keep remembering to do, but we've had a verse for the year. It's from 1 John 2, verse 6.

[23 : 43] If we claim to live in Him, we must walk as He walked. And we want to try and be like Jesus in the way we live our life. How do we live like Jesus? Well, we go to the people with leprosy.

We try and do what Jesus did, and we can't touch them to make them clean. But we can make them know about Jesus. We can tell them. We don't stand back from them.

And I think of myself in these face masks. I'm one of these people that my wife has to give a row of. She's seen me in the supermarket in the past year. My social distancing is not what it should be, especially if something's got a yellow label on it. I'll dive in to get the reduced item.

But what are we all worried about? We're all worried that people are going to catch what we've got, or that we catch what they've got. And aren't the people with the greatest need out there with it?

Maybe in here with it too, but we can't stay away from them. We need to go to them, and we need to try and make them well. And we also need to, as we try to be like Jesus, we've got to be like the man, but not like the man. Don't be like the man in disobeying Jesus, because Jesus said, don't tell anyone, but go show yourself to the priest. It tells us in Mark's gospel that he spoke. It wasn't just, well, you can see how the speaking would happen, because everybody would see it and say, what's happened to you? And there he is, hugging his wife for the first time in five years. What's happened to him? He's been cured.

[25 : 35] By who? By Jesus. But Jesus said, don't tell anyone. But he couldn't stop himself. One writer asks, why is it that Jesus tells him not to tell?

And he tells. And he tells us in the Great Commission to go and tell. And it's the biggest secret we've got. What's wrong with us? What's wrong with us that we don't tell people how our leprosy has been cleansed, how our sin has been removed, how our death is not the end, but as an entry into a new heaven and a new earth, to be with the one who cleansed us from our leprosy. So, what can you take away? Be like Jesus and go to people. Be like the man and tell people what he has done for us. Well, may God use that for us in the coming week as we remember what he has done. Let's listen to praise again. We're going to hear, behold our God from sovereign grace, thinking of the power of God and the grace of God to work for us. Let's listen to this.