

Mark 1:41

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[0 : 00] Could you now turn back with me to that passage that we read in Mark's gospel, Mark chapter 1, and especially words in verse 41, but we'll read from verse 40.

This is on page 1003. A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Jesus was indignant, or I think the better translation as it is in the footnote there, was filled with compassion.

He reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean. He was a man that was untouchable, and it was the touch of Jesus' hand that healed him and that changed his life.

In India, there's a group of people known as the Dalits who traditionally were low-caste, untouchable, outcaste. People wouldn't want anything to do with him.

They wouldn't want their daughters to marry them because they were considered to be untouchable. How about you this morning? Do you feel in some way marginalized or excluded, or perhaps feeling that you don't really belong?

[1 : 35] Maybe you need the touch of Jesus' hand. Or perhaps there's some area in your life that is untouchable, some area you're ashamed of, or some area that just makes it difficult for you to feel that you belong.

You're afraid that that area might be exposed. You need the touch of Jesus' hand. Perhaps you feel none of that. Perhaps this morning everything's fine.

You feel you belong. You've got a certain social status. But what about your relationship with God? When people talk about that, perhaps you feel a little bit left on the outside excluded.

You need the touch of Jesus' hand. Because you see, the Bible is not a medical textbook. It's not a sociological or psychological textbook.

It's primarily a spiritual textbook. It's primary concern is not with our physical or mental or social health.

[2 : 40] It's primary concern is with our spiritual health, our relationship with God. The healing miracles of Jesus. The healing miracles of Jesus are set against a particular perspective on suffering.

And it's quite an intricate connection and one that we have to speak about very carefully because often there's misunderstandings in this area. Because it concerns the link between sin and suffering.

You know how in the beginning of the Bible God created the world and it was all very good. But He told the first human couple that they were to obey Him, to really enjoy the life that He intended for them.

And they were set a test. And as we know, they failed that test. They rebelled against God. They listened to the voice of evil instead of the voice of God.

And as a result of that, that human rebellion against God brought suffering into the world. Because in Genesis chapter 2 verse 17, God had warned them saying, In the day that you disobey me, in the day that you eat this fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, dying you will die.

[4 : 02] And that summed up really the whole of the consequences of rebelling against God and all the suffering that would follow. Dying you will die.

And Genesis chapter 3 spells that out. How there comes curse, there comes pain, there comes toil, and there comes death. So, there is obviously a link between the fall of the human race into sin and the resultant suffering.

But here's where we have to be careful. There is no necessary link between the individual sin and disease. In John chapter 9, the disciples pointed out someone to Jesus, this man who was born blind.

And he was a kind of conundrum to them because, you know, they could understand someone suffering in this life later on in life because of something bad that they'd done in life.

But here was a man who was born blind. So, they were struggling with this. Was it this man who sinned or was it his parents that he was born blind? They had to make some kind of personal connection between sin and suffering because that was the idea of that time.

[5 : 16] But Jesus said, no, it's not that this man sinned or his parents. It's so that the glory and grace of God may be revealed in him. And as we know, he healed the man.

So, Jesus warns against us making any necessary connection between individual sin and disease or suffering. Of course, it can happen. Of course, it can happen because of our own fault, because of our own bad behavior or whatever it is.

It may bring certain consequences of disease or suffering, but there's no necessary connection. However, the key to understanding all this is seen, I think, most clearly in Isaiah chapter 53, which is a prophecy about Jesus.

And in it, it says of him, surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, but he was pierced for our transgressions.

And this same passage is quoted in Matthew chapter 8, where it says, Jesus healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.

[6 : 25] Now, Isaiah, that passage in Isaiah is primarily about Jesus atoning for our sins. But his saving work is illustrated in his healing diseases.

Therefore, it's as if disease is an illustration of sin. It illustrates to it. It's like a visual aid showing something of the consequences of sin.

And also here in this passage, there's the idea of cleansing used. This word that's used here to cleanse this leper, it's a word that is also used of cleansing from sin.

In 1 John chapter 1 verse 9, John says there, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us or cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It's the same word. So, there is this connection. And we see this focus on the importance of our relationship to God in the context of suffering in the very next chapter, in Mark chapter 2.

[7 : 35] The healing of the paralyzed man.

Illustrated of his spiritual paralysis. And it's perhaps in that passage that we see the closest connection between the two. Therefore, the miraculous physical healing is a kind of parable of the necessary spiritual healing.

In addition to that, this is also a foretaste of the healing of all pains and diseases in the new heavens and the new earth.

The new creation, the new universe that God is going to make. Revelation chapter 21 verse 4, So, Jesus' healing speaks of that healing by His grace of our disease of sin.

But it also speaks of the fact that ultimately He is going to put right all that is wrong with this world, including suffering and disease.

[9 : 09] But here we have a man in a desperate condition this morning. This man who suffered from leprosy. Now, leprosy was spoken with bated breath in those days because it was such a horrible disease.

There was no cure for it. There was no cure for it. And people didn't know what to do apart from just excluding people. Now, in the ancient world, there wasn't the exact medical knowledge to distinguish between various skin diseases.

So, what is described here may have been what we now call leprosy today. That is Hansen's disease. It may have been some other disease. We couldn't say absolutely, confidently, 100%.

But there is evidence of, in the ancient world, them knowing exactly what leprosy was, what we call leprosy today. And that dates back to ancient Egypt, about 4000 BC.

And it was discussed by the Greek doctor Hippocrates, the one from which we get the Hippocratic Oath that doctors, I think, used to take. It dates right back to him in 460 BC where he describes it accurately.

[10 : 21] And interestingly, the earliest proven human case of leprosy was verified by DNA taken from the remains of a man discovered in a tomb in the old city of Jerusalem.

And it was dated by radiocarbon methods to the year 1 to 50 AD. In other words, the man who died of that leprosy, he was a contemporary of Jesus.

So, there's no doubt that the condition existed in Jesus' day. But the point is that whatever the exact nature of the disease, it excluded the man from human society and from the public worship of God. Because in Leviticus chapter 13, it's made clear that leprosy was to be excluded from the community. And no doubt, part of that was isolation to prevent the spread of infection. But also, it was illustrative of the contamination of sin. This whole link that we've been talking about, the comparison between disease and sin.

[11 : 26] There's also the interesting fact that leprosy deadens pain. Now, you might think that might be a good thing because so much of our time we spend buying things from the chemists to try to cure our pains.

But in fact, leprosy deadening pain is a very deadly thing. Because when that happens, someone doesn't know that they've actually injured themselves.

So, someone can put their hand on something hot or in the fire and they don't feel it. And of course, their fingers or their hand is destroyed. Or they can go over their ankle and they don't feel it.

And the trouble, of course, gets worse. And again, isn't that something that's so illustrative of sin? That sin deadens. The more and more we go on in the disease of sin, it deadens our conscience and our sensitivity to God and what He wants to say to us.

So, here we have a man who was suffering. He was excluded. He was isolated. And he is, in that sense, the perfect picture of the fallen sinful human condition.

[12 : 33] It seems a hopeless situation. We're isolated from God because our sins have separated us from God, as it is said in the prophet Isaiah.

Bob Dylan called this the disease of conceit. Pride or self-conceit can prevent us from facing up to the true nature of the disease of sin because that pride is at the very heart of God.

It's a very important part of what sin is, a rebellion against God. I knew a man that I met in the last stages of his life.

He was a down and out on the streets of Edinburgh. And in his earlier life, he'd been a teacher in my school. He didn't actually teach me.

He taught my brothers. He went on to become a lecturer and a principal in a college of education, an assistant director of education.

[13 : 55] And yet he ended up a down and out on the streets of Edinburgh. He himself said that his trouble was caused by the two A's.

You know how he'd talk about Alcoholics Anonymous. Well, he had another two A's. One was alcohol and the other, he said, was ambition. And these were the two things that led to his downfall. But actually, as part of that ambition, there was a third day of arrogance, of not being prepared to accept his utter wrongness and his need of salvation.

And isn't that at the heart of all our sin, all our rebellion against God, that pride that will not bow the knee and surrender to realize that we're wrong?

So, what can we do? What can anyone do? Well, what did this man do? We're told that he came to Jesus.

[15 : 01] He came to Jesus just as he was. There was no way that he could clean up his act. There was no way that he could make himself less contaminating or whatever.

He had to come just as he was. There was nothing he could do to make himself more acceptable. And that reminds us of the words that we've just been singing. That hymn by Horatius Bonner.

I came to Jesus as I was. So weary, worn, and sad. I found in him a resting place. And he has made me glad.

You see, we've just got to come as we are. There's no way that we can clean up our act. There's no way that we can make ourselves less sinful. It's sinners that Jesus came to save.

So this morning, if you still don't know the grace of the Lord Jesus, don't think that you've got to sort of turn over a new leaf, improve your life in some way before you can come to him.

[16 : 00] You come to him. And you hand over your life to him. And he puts things right. Jesus is inviting us to come. He's saying to you this morning, Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

So this man came to Jesus, and he came just as he was. But he came also humbly. We're told he came on his knees. He fell on his knees before Jesus. And also he said to Jesus, If you are willing. And that speaks humility, doesn't it? Because so many people today think that God owes them. You know, that if there's a God there at all, Well, he should do this, and he should do that, and he should

do the next thing.

This man had no such attitude. He came humbly, saying, If you are willing. Because you see, ultimately, God owes us nothing. He's given us everything, and we've spoiled it. He owes us nothing but condemnation and judgment and wrath and hell. That's what he owes us. The truth is that we owe God. We owe God love and trust and obedience that we haven't given. [17:11] So this man came humbly, and that's the way we must come, If you are willing. And we notice also the man's faith, Because he said, If you are willing, you can make me clean.

He had no doubt that Jesus could do it. He had no doubt in the power and the love and the compassion of Jesus That he could do it. So many people today would turn around what the man says here.

They would say, Well, if you can cure me, you must be willing. But you see, the man had the right way around. He put the question mark in the right place.

If you are willing, then you are able to do it. You can do it. So he had faith in Jesus' power to heal. So no matter what your situation or condition, You can come to the Lord Jesus. All you have to do is to trust him as this man did. And he can do everything necessary to heal your broken relationship with God.

[18:20] In Isaiah chapter 53, that passage we referred to already, But in verse 6 it says, Jesus has done all that's necessary.

All we have to do is to come and receive it. So what was the response of Jesus then to this man? Because that will tell us about what his response to us will be if we come to him.

Well, the first thing we see is that there was compassion. And I think that is the better reading here. It could be translated, he was indignant.

The idea that he's indignant against the disease and so on. But I think supremely, whenever Jesus is dealing with people, It is mainly compassion that he shows.

Now there's no equivalent in the English language for this word that is translated here. The nearest expression would be something like a gut-wrenching compassion. And it's that idea, you know, in older translations, It would be translated as something to do with your bowels, Which doesn't seem all that relevant to us today.

[19:32] But I'll tell you what it is. You see a young child, maybe your own child or a grandchild, Running along the road. And they suddenly trip and fall.

And immediately there's something inside you that kind of tightens, As you identify with what has happened to them. You feel it. That's the meaning of this word, compassion.

It is being deeply moved in tender sympathy, Or even we might say empathy, With the person. And it's interesting that the verb that's used here, Is used in the Gospels, Only of Jesus Himself, Except in three parables that He Himself told, Illustrative of His compassion.

The three parables, The unmerciful servant, The prodigal son, And the good Samaritan. It's a word that especially we associate with Jesus. Because He was moved, He was deeply moved by spiritual lostness.

He looked at the crowds, And He saw that they were harassed and helpless, Like sheep without a shepherd, And He had compassion on them. He was moved by the suffering and sorrow of others.

[20:47] But you know, The really revolutionary thing about this in New Testament times, Was that in Greek thought, God was unmoved by the human condition.

They had a word for it, Apathia. It's a word from which we get apathy. It wasn't exactly apathy or indifference that they meant by it. It was being incapable of suffering.

That was their idea of the gods or of God. And this was the world into which there burst This great emphasis on the grace and compassion and love of God.

That so transformed that first century world. Here, we have the Son of God, God in the flesh, Being deeply moved to the depths of His being By the suffering of an untouchable.

Someone that no one else would have anything to do with. And Jesus was moved by His condition. So, whatever your condition is today, Know this, That Jesus has compassion on you.

[21:56] And He's saying to you, Come to me, All you who are weary and burdened, And I will give you rest. But of course, Not only did Jesus feel compassion towards the man, He also reached out to him, We're told.

He reached out. Jesus doesn't just feel love. He shows love. He acts in love. He reaches out. In fact, His whole incarnate ministry could be described As an outreach, A reaching out.

He came from the glories of heaven To the miseries and suffering of earth. He came where people are hurting and lost and dying. He came down, The prince of glory, To lie in a manger.

Because there was no room for Him. Where within perhaps a few weeks of His birth, He was a refugee down to Egypt. He reaches out to the poor and the lost.

And He reached out to this poor, Excluded outcast leper. And today He's reaching out to you, Whoever you may be, And whatever your condition is. But not only did He have compassion, Not only did He reach out, But He actually touched the man with His hand.

[23 : 13] The leper was untouchable. Nobody would have gone within a mile of Him If they could have helped Him. I don't know if you've ever seen the great film Ben-Hur, Which is set during the lifetime of Jesus.

You don't actually see Jesus' face, You see His back. But Ben-Hur, The main character, His sister and wife, They become infected with leprosy.

And there's a scene in that film, Where people are running away from them, Or throwing stones at them, To drive them away. That's a very accurate picture, Of how people felt about leprosy.

But not only does Jesus not run from Him, He reaches out His hand, And He touches him. As I mentioned to the children, The dramatic effect of Princess Diana Visiting the AIDS patient and touching him Was kind of illustrative, Of the same kind of shock That people would have felt here When Jesus touched this man.

And of course, There was no need for Jesus to touch him, To heal his leprosy. He once healed somebody miles away By just saying He was healed.

[24 : 27] But Jesus touched him. And Jesus touched him deliberately. And by doing that, In the eyes of those there, Jesus Himself became contaminated.

Jesus Himself became unclean. Jesus Himself became untouchable, Ceremonially unclean, Excluded from the worship of God, An outcast. But Jesus deliberately touched him.

Not only did this communicate His love and compassion to the man, But it was also a parable of His life's work. He brought healing By taking the contamination And suffering of sin on Himself.

He took up our infirmities And carried our diseases. Or as Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 2, He bore our sins in His body on the tree.

That's how much He has come near to us. That's how much His compassion Has reached out to us. He's come and He has borne it all on Himself.

[25 : 31] So do you know this touch of Jesus' hand This morning? This touch of love and compassion? This touch of transformation and cleansing? You can know it by God's grace, By trusting in Him.

There's an old poem called The Old Violin, Which was written, I think, In the early 20th century. And it goes like this. It was battered and scarred, And the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while To waste much time on the old violin As he held it up with a smile.

What are my bidding, good folks? He cried. Who'll start the bidding for me? A dollar? A dollar.

Who'll make it two? Two dollars. Who'll make it three? Three dollars once?

Three dollars twice? And going and gone? But no. From the room far back Came a gray-haired man And he picked it up with the bow. And wiping the dust from the old violin And tightening up all the strings, He played a melody pure and sweet, As sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased, And the auctioneer in a voice That was quiet and low said, What am I bid for the old violin? As he held it up with the bow.

[26 : 48] A thousand dollars. Who'll make it two? Two thousand. Who'll make it three? Three thousand once? Three thousand twice? And going and gone? Said he. And the people cheered, But some of them said, We do not quite understand What changed its worth?

Swift came the reply. It was the touch of the master's hand. And there's many a man With his life out of tune, That's battered and torn with sin, Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd, Much like the old violin.

A mess of pottage, a glass of wine, A game and he travels on, He's going once, he's going twice, He's going and almost gone. But the master comes, And the foolish crowd Never can quite understand

The worth of a soul, Or the change that is wrought By the touch of the master's hand.

You too can know that transforming touch Of the master's hand. I don't know if you feel That your life is out of tune, Or if you feel you're battered And torn with sin. But you know that's Jesus' verdict of us, Because he says, Whoever commits sin Is a slave to sin.

You're estranged from God Because of your rebellious heart, If you don't know. You need the touch of Jesus' hand In his love, Taking all the burden Of your sin and suffering And exclusion on himself. [28 : 15] That's why he cried out, My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me? He was abandoned. He was excluded. He was untouchable. So that you can be embraced And brought into the very family of God.

All you have to do Is to ask him. Let's pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, We thank you for the great grace And compassion of Jesus Reaching out to us.

We thank you it reached out To that man long ago. It has reached out To countless millions of people Throughout history And throughout the world today. And it's reaching to us here.

And we pray for anyone here this morning Who as yet doesn't know you. That they too may know That your love is reaching to them. And we pray that they would respond To that message of grace. So that they would know The loving kindness and grace And transformation of God's power. And so we ask these things In Jesus' name and for his sake.

[29 : 19] Amen.